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THEOLOGY,

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IN

A SERIES OF SERMONS:

BY

TIMOTHY DWIGHT, S. T. D. LL. D.

LATE PRESIDENT OF YALE COLLEGE.

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A Memoir

OF

THE LIFE OF THE AUTHOR.

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SERMON CXL.

THE ORDINARY MEANS OF GRACE.

THE USEFULNESS OF PRAYER TO INDIVIDUALS.

Pray without ceasing.—1 THESS. v. 17.

IN the preceding discourse, I considered the *nature* and *seasons of prayer*, and the *obligation which we are under to pray*. I shall now discuss, at some length, the fourth subject proposed at that time; *viz.* the *usefulness of prayer*.

The observations which I shall make concerning this subject, will be included under the following general heads:

The usefulness of prayer by its own proper influence; and,

Its efficacy in procuring blessings from God.

The first of these heads, viz. *the usefulness of prayer by its own proper influence*, I shall consider *as it respects*

Individuals;

Families; and,

Public societies.

In this discourse it is my intention to exhibit the *usefulness of prayer to individuals by its proper influence on themselves.*

Before I proceed to the direct discussion of this subject it will be useful to observe, that the personal concerns of an individual are the proper subjects of *secret prayer.* The propriety of such prayer is wholly derived from the fact, that we have many important interests, which are only personal, and require to be transacted between us and our Maker. In their very nature, they are incapable of being disclosed to our fellow-creatures, without material disadvantages. Often they are such, as we would not, on any account, reveal to any human being whatever. Often the disclosure, although not injurious to our moral or intellectual character, would wound our delicacy, or involve us in

other kinds of distress. In a multitude of instances, where they are already *partially* known, we are still unable to disclose them entirely, and with that freedom which is indispensable to the due performance of this duty. Before our Maker, strange as it may seem, we can use a freedom of communication, which cannot be exercised towards any created being. We know, that he is already acquainted with whatever we have experienced, done, or suffered, either within or without the mind. We know, that he is not infinitely removed from all the partialities, and prejudices, from all those cold, unkind, and contemptuous sentiments, which are so generally cherished by our fellow-men. We know, that he will not betray us; but, however unworthy we have been, will regard us, if sincere and penitent, with kindness and mercy. We approach him, therefore, with a freedom, a confidence, of communication, which can be used towards no other being in the universe.

Besides, God is nearer to all men, than any man to another. If we are willing to choose him as our friend; he is infinitely the nearest, the best, the most affectionate, of all friends. With him, therefore, a communion can, and does, exist, which no creature can hold with a fellow-creature.

In consequence of these facts, a freedom and a fervency also exists in secret prayer, when the subject of it is our personal concerns, which cannot exist in the presence of others.

With these things premised, I observe, that the usefulness of prayer to individuals is found,

First, *In the peculiar solemnity which it naturally induces on the mind.*

In secret prayer, a man comes directly into the presence of God. This great and awful Being is the source of all solemn thoughts and emotions in his creatures; and the object in which such thoughts ultimately terminate. Every thing in *his* character, every thing in *our* character and circumstances, every thing in our relations to him, and in the situation in which we are thus placed; the end for which we have entered our closets; the duty which we are performing; the retirement from the world; the presence of

God, and the consciousness that his eye is on our hearts; all these conspire to drive away every trifling thought, and to banish every improper emotion. It is scarcely possible that the man, who has withdrawn to his closet, for the purpose of meeting God face to face; and who here remembers before whom he stands, on what business he has come, and of what importance that business is to himself; should fail to fix his thoughts in solemnity and awe, and hush every tendency to an unbecoming emotion.

To all men, this state of mind is eminently useful, and indispensably necessary. Spiritual and immortal concerns demand, of course, and most obviously, this state of mind. We cannot attend to them, in any other state, with advantage; nor without serious disadvantage. We cannot see them as they are, nor feel them as they are. We cannot be influenced to attend to them, nor to provide for them, as they indispensably demand. As they are of all possible consequence to us; so this state of mind, the only one in which we can usefully attend to them; becomes of a proportional importance.

Thus forgiveness of sin, a restoration to holiness, resolutions to perform our duty, the effectual pursuit of salvation and the final escape from ruin, can never be useful objects of attention and effort to him whose mind is not settled in that state of solemnity, which these mighty concerns require. The soul which is given up to levity, regards them, of course, with habitual indifference: and not unfrequently with habitual contempt. By a man of this character, therefore, they will be neglected and forgotten.

Secondly. *Prayer is useful to an individual, as it enlightens and quickens the conscience.*

Conscience *is the judgment of the mind concerning its moral conduct, both internal and external.* By this judgment of the mind, we are, and of necessity must be, ultimately directed in every case of a moral nature. It is, therefore, of the utmost importance, that it should be formed aright.

Conscience, also, is used both in the Scriptures and elsewhere, with a direct reference to those *emotions* or *feelings which we experience, when this judgment is formed; and which usually have more or less influence upon the formation of the judgment itself, and upon the conduct by*

which it is followed. When these are just and vigorous, we are not only directed, but prompted, to act aright. When they are dull and lifeless, we are apt, how just soever the judgment may be, either not to act at all, or to act in direct violation of its dictates. In every such case, our conduct is sinful; and often, when, under the influence of a conscience more tender and susceptible, it would have been virtuous. Hence the plain necessity of having our consciences quickened, or made alive to our duty. *A seared conscience* denotes, not the want of a capacity to judge, but an insensibility to the importance of moral good and evil.

Among the means placed in our power of enlightening and quickening the conscience, prayer after the Scriptures is, in my view, the first, and far superior to any other. It is, also, the chief mean of rendering the Scriptures themselves effectual to this end.

When we stand in our closets, immediately before God, are secluded from the world, and withdrawn from every eye but his; when we feel the awe inspired by a clear view of his character, and realize in an affecting manner his presence and inspection; it can hardly be possible for us not to entertain, concerning our Creator, ourselves, and all moral objects, views, exceedingly different from those gross apprehensions, which we experience in ordinary circumstances. We can hardly fail to discern our sinful character, and to regard sin as a real and great evil. God, in spite of all our ordinary stupidity, will then appear to be an awful, perfect, and glorious Being; his law to be holy, just, and good; its extent to comprehend all our thoughts and actions alike; its nature, demands, and penalties, to be unchangeable; and ourselves to be condemned, and if left in our present condition, to be ruined. In this situation we farther discern of course, that many things are sinful which we have customarily regarded as innocent; and that many things are duties; to perform which we have heretofore felt little or no obligation.

These views are particularly enlarged, and rendered more distinct, by means of our confessions and petitions. When we confess our sins before God; we are compelled to such sincerity of thought, as well as of speech, as must induce us to throw aside a multitude of prejudices, self-justifications, and self-flatteries; usually and very pleas-

ingly cherished. We know that we cannot deceive God; and are certain, that even our inmost thoughts are naked to the all-seeing eye. Little inducement is presented to us, therefore, to think falsely of our conduct. So far as our views extend, they naturally become just and scriptural. In this state, every sin which we confess is apt to be seen as it is; as a sin; as a violation of the law of God; as an act of opposition to his will; and as a source to us of guilt and condemnation. The vanity strongly appears of attempting to hide our guilt from his sight; and of course the necessity, as well as the duty, of acknowledging it before him. Hence, while the confession of all our sins is forcibly prompted, the confession of each is naturally rendered sincere. Hence also the sinner sees many things to be sinful, which he has usually thought innocent; perhaps virtuous; and the whole number of his sins to be far greater than he has before mistrusted.

In our *petitions*, we ask for the blessing of God. If we ask for forgiveness, we ask for the forgiveness of our sins; and of course discern, that we have sins to be forgiven. This forgiveness is necessary for *every* sin. While the eye of the mind is employed in wandering with solemn anxiety over this interesting subject, and inquiring with deep solicitude what and how numerous are the cases in which this forgiveness is needed; it is impossible for us not to perceive, that we have many, very many sins to be forgiven.

If we ask for sanctification, we ask it for sinners, to whom this blessing is necessary. In the same character, we ask for justification, for adoption, for increase of grace, and for perseverance unto the end. In a word, our guilty character will recur and present itself before our eyes, with every petition which we make.

Nor will the necessity and excellence of holiness appear with less evidence. Sin is our ruin: holiness is our recovery. Both are alike important: the one being as dreadful as the other is desirable. Of all the blessings for which we ask, holiness is the basis, the means, and the end. To every one of them it inseparably adheres; with every one it is intimately blended. Our views therefore will be as naturally

and as extensively engaged by it; and be as naturally rendered clear and impressive.

As these two great attributes are the only ones which characterize our moral conduct; so the clearer and brighter our views of these things are, the more enlightened of course is our conscience, or the judgment of our minds concerning that conduct. When we ask God for his blessing on any thing which we are about to do, we shall in this way discern with more certainty its real nature; especially as it appears to our own view; than in any other situation. We often, as we think, convince ourselves by reasoning, that a proposed pursuit is lawful and right; when we in fact believe it to be otherwise. In most if not all such cases, *the first judgment of our minds,* that which we usually denominate the decision of conscience, has already determined it to be wrong. On the *future reasoning,* inclination has usually had no small share of influence; and has warped the judgment of the mind so, as to lead it to false conclusions. With these conclusions however, we are but too prone to feel satisfied.

But, if we attempt to ask the blessing of God upon such conduct in our closets, we shall often find our attempts to be vain. Our mouths will be stopped, and our efforts to pray annihilated. Some persons declare, and appear to believe, that *gaming* is lawful and justifiable. But no one ever asked, no one can ever seriously ask, the blessing of God on a design to game. There are persons who declare *lewdness* to be lawful. But no person can ask God to bless a lewd purpose. An attempt of this nature would choke the utterance even of a profligate.

When we ask the same blessing on similar conduct already past, the same consequences will follow; and we shall be forced, in spite of ourselves, to acknowledge and feel the guilt of that which is sinful. Notwithstanding his utmost efforts, the sinner will be checked in all his attempts to pray, so long as he justifies, so long as he does not confess and lament, his guilty conduct; however satisfied with himself he was in the perpetration. Until he becomes willing to forsake his sins, they will *hinder his prayers.* Nor can he continue to sin, and continue to pray.

This doctrine St. Peter teaches in the third chapter of his First epistle. In the seventh verse, he directs *husbands to live with their wives*, as in the preceding verses he had directed wives to live with their husbands, in the performance of all the duties of conjugal affection, and in a general obedience to the precepts of the gospel. For these directions he subjoins his reason in the following words; *that your prayers be not hindered.* According to this decision of the apostle, disobedience to the gospel, and the neglect of the duties required by it, *hinder* of course *the prayers* of mankind. In other words, *sin is the direct hinderance of prayer.* Every person who prays to God, will continually find, by his own experience, that this account of the subject is true; and that, whenever he sins, his prayers are hindered. Of course, he will be obliged to relinquish his sins or desist from his prayers. Should he continue to pray, all the views which I have mentioned, and all others like them, will continually recur; and will soon become habitual. They will soon constitute the general current of his thinking on moral subjects. But the more clear, distinct, and habitual, our thoughts concerning moral subjects become, the more strongly and the more uniformly shall we feel these subjects. Their importance will not only be seen, but regarded with much solemnity, deep interest, and influential concern. The soul, continuing in prayer without ceasing, becomes alive to all such subjects. These are the chief subjects of its prayers; and prayer is its chief duty. Moral subjects therefore resume their proper place and rank in its estimation; and find a susceptibility in its regard, wholly due to *them*, and immensely interesting to *itself*. In this way, prayer contributes, to a degree which cannot be limited, to withdraw the soul from sin; to disarm temptations of their fascinating influence; to waken the power of passion; and to increase the hopes and means, of resistance. In the same manner are the views and emotions which regard holiness improved; and resolution and strength gained to make progress in the divine life.

Thirdly: *Prayer is useful to unregenerated individuals, by teaching them, that so long as they continue in this state, they cannot pray in the manner required by God.*

Unregenerate men, when affected with a deep sense of their guilt, and a solemn concern for their future destiny, universally pray. But all such men, before they have made attempts of this nature, believe, whatever may be their creed, that they can pray with their present disposition, so as at least to satisfy themselves; and, not improbably, so as to be acceptable to God. There is no way, within my knowledge, in which they so effectually unlearn this doctrine, and so entirely give up this belief, as by their own attempts at prayer. The peculiarly clear, distinct, and affecting views of moral subjects, which I have already mentioned, are of course directed to their prayers, as well, as much, and probably more, than any other subjects of this nature. Their prayers, in the act of offering them up to God, are seen by them in a light, and with a distinctness and certainty, never perhaps experienced in any other case. Amid the anxiety and earnestness with which awakened sinners pray, they come, without an exception, first to doubt their own ability to pray as they ought; and then, without a doubt, to believe that their prayers are wholly destitute of evangelical worth: at least, I never knew an exception to this process in any person who, in this situation, has disclosed his views of the subject to me. Perhaps I ought rather to say, I remember none. This important part of self-knowledge is, I believe rarely, if at all, acquired in any other way. In this situation, and by these means, sinners, if I mistake not, are chiefly brought to a state of absolute humiliation, and a full conviction of their entire dependance on Christ for holiness and salvation. Not to be able to pray, so as to be in some degree satisfied and comforted by our prayers, is to be poor indeed. This humbled, dependant state of the mind is, as I formly observed, that in which the grace of the gospel is usually bestowed on men.

Fourthly. *Prayer is useful to individuals, as it teaches them their dependance on God.*

The act of asking for blessings in prayer, which is its primary employment, brings up forcibly to our view the impossibility of furnishing them to ourselves. The blessings also, for which we ask, are seen to be absolutely necessary for us, and such as none but God can give. They

are the result of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness, alone. Of these interesting truths, the suppliant cannot fail to perceive the clearest evidence, and to experience the strongest impression.

To this sense of dependance on God, our *adoration*, in which we recite his glorious perfections in the most solemn manner; our *confession*, in which we recount our sins and wants, our infinite need of forgiveness, and our utter insufficiency to supply ourselves with the necessary good; and our *thanksgiving*, in which we acknowledge, that all the blessings enjoyed by us have come from God only; irresistibly conspire to make large additions. As the God, whose immensely great and glorious character we humbly and solemnly repeat, is presented to our view as rich in all good; we feel ourselves to be poor, and little, and sinful, and naked, and in want of all things.

Alone, withdrawn from the world, in the immediate presence of JEHOVAH, we cannot but see these things in the strongest light, and by themselves. The eye of the mind is turned solely and intensely upon them, and prevented from the obscurity, confusion, and consequent perplexity, which necessarily attend all complicated views. With such apprehensions, we can scarcely fail to feel, in the deepest manner, this most important subject. It becomes the burden of our thoughts and our language. The value of the blessings themselves, our indebtedness to God for them, our own unworthiness of them all, and the mercy manifested in bestowing them, unitedly impress them on our hearts with a force peculiar and pre-eminent.

As the pardon of our sins, and the justification, adoption, and sanctification, of our souls, constitute the means of all other good; so they are seen, felt, and acknowledged, even by the convinced sinner, to be his own, highest, and immediate good. For this good he will cry with intense earnestness to him in whom alone he finds either ability or disposition to communicate this invaluable blessing. With deep humiliation, with intense anguish, he casts himself at the foot of the cross, with the prayer of the publican, *God be merciful to me a sinner;* or with that of the disciples, when the ship, in which they were conveyed, was ready to sink; *Lord save me, or I perish!* In this situation of the

soul, desponding, convinced of its guilt and danger, and feeling the infinite necessity of forgiveness and renovation, God, in all his ordinary providence, has been graciously pleased to extend mercy to sinners, and to bring them into his kingdom. This is not done because of any excellency in their prayers, or in their characters; for no such excellency exists; but because they infinitely need his mercy; and also, if I am not deceived, because there is an evident propriety in bestowing it on them, when in this situation, rather than while they are stupid, blind, and hardened in their sins.

The Christian, in the same manner, learns, with still more clearness, and stronger affections, his own absolute dependance on his Maker. All his springs of holiness and happiness he perceives to be in God. Innumerable sins he discovers lying at his door; many and various lusts remaining in his heart; wants of many kinds, and of great importance, rising up continually to his view; his guilt dreadfully great, and his danger extreme. No being but God can remove the evils from which he suffers, or those which he dreads. None but God can supply the blessings which he feels to be his all.

In the whole of the Christian course, he realizes, in the most affecting manner, his absolute necessity of being enabled by the grace of God to resist temptation, to overcome lust, to vanquish enemeis, to subdue sin, and to advance in obedience. Every evil affection he sees capable of being removed, or lessened, by the assistance of God only: and by the same assistance he must be furnished with all his ability to live a holy life, and to cultivate every virtuous propensity. From God only, he also knows, must be derived his daily hope, support, and consolation; peace of mind, evidence of the love of God, increase in grace, and *a patient continuance in well-doing*. God only can cleanse his soul, refine and exalt his views, remove his fears, quicken his affections, brighten his hopes, and multiply his joys. All these are blessings, possessed by none beside the infinite mind; and gifts of none but the almighty hand. At the same time, they are blessings which God is supremely pleased to bestow. His nature is bounty; and giving is his favourite employment.

But he is pleased to *be inquired of* for all blessings. Ready as he is to bestow, it is his pleasure, that all his rational creatures should ask. Accordingly he requires *all flesh to come to him* with their requests; and, for their encouragement, styles himself *a God hearing prayer*. With these delightful views of the divine character, and with affecting apprehensions of his own circumstances, every Christian comes to God; and finds in prayer peculiar encouragement, hope, assistance, strength, enjoyment, and universal edification.

Fifthly. *Prayer is useful to individuals, as it furnishes to them the best views of the divine character.*

Prayer brings home to the mind the character of God with peculiar advantage in many ways. Some of these have been already mentioned; as being inseparably connected with the subjects which I have had occasion to consider. Several others I shall now briefly recount. It is impossible, that a suppliant should fail to remember, with peculiar strength and conviction, this glorious being as his Creator, Preserver, and Benefactor, his Father, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. These are themes of his prayer, in all the parts of it; and are perpetually recurring. They rise in his adoration, confession, thanksgivings, and petitions. They rise in every profitable form. He cannot think of a want, a sin, or a blessing, without realizing against whom his sins have been committed, by whom his wants must be supplied, and from whom his blessings must flow. He cannot but recall with deep affection the justice of that great Being whom he has offended; the holiness of him whose image he is required to exhibit; the purity of him whose all-seeing eye is intent on his sins; the power of him, by whom he was created, and has been always preserved; and the goodness, faithfulness, truth, and mercy, of him, to whose mercy, truth, and faithfulness, he must be indebted for the forgiveness of his sins, and the performance of all the promises contained in the covenant of grace, and to whose goodness he must owe every future blessing of time and eternity.

In prayer, God literally draws nigh to him, and he to God. In a sense, he beholds his character in full view; as we distinctly see near objects with the bodily eye. The divine

perfections are, therefore, realized and acknowledged; and not merely and loosely proved by argument to our understandings. Like Job, he before had heard of God by the *hearing of the ear; but now his eye seeth him.* As his prayers return daily; so his views, returning with them, soon become habitual; and, like other habitual things, become continually stronger and stronger, more and more bright, just, and affecting. The great, glorious, and delightful character, on which he so frequently dwells, is in a sense instamped on his heart; and always realized and enjoyed. Thus a peace and satisfaction are derived to him from prayer, for which nothing can be a substitute. By prayer, therefore, as a Christian he lives; and lives with holiness, and wisdom, daily increasing; is continually a better man in all the relations of the present life, and a more and more proper candidate for immortal happiness in the world above.

That each of the several things, which I have mentioned as effects flowing from the performance of this duty, is, in an eminent degree, useful to him who performs it, will be questioned by no sober man. Still more strongly will it be perceived, that all these advantages, united, must be of pre-eminent importance. To be destitute of them must be, in the spiritual sense, to be *poor, and wretched, and miserable.* All of them, however, exhibit this subject, when considered by themselves, in an imperfect manner. These views and dispositions, in their connexions and consequences, are branched out into others; and then into others still; in such numbers, in so continual a succession, and with such efficacious influence, as to affect with the greatest advantage the whole Christian character, and to reach through every part of the Christian life. Every where their influence is felt; and, wherever it is felt, is benign and happy. Hence the Scriptures insist so abundantly on the performance of this duty; and, to secure their benevolent purpose, multiply, every where, commands, examples, and promises.

REMARKS.

From this summary and imperfect account of the usefulness of prayer to individuals, I remark,

1st. *That he, who does not habitually pray to God, cannot be a Christian.*

God has commanded us to pray to him; and is pleased to *be inquired of* by his creatures for all the good which they need. He, who does not pray, violates continually a plain command of the Scriptures; and proves himself indifferent to the great and comprehensive duty of obeying his Maker. But this is a contradiction to the whole Christian character.

This, however, is not the only ground of the conclusion; nor that, on which I meant principally to insist at the present time. In the character and circumstances of a Christian, is laid the most solid foundation of habitual prayer. His sins perpetually present to him the infinite necessity of forgiveness and sanctification. His love to God, and his good-will to mankind, excite in him, by their very nature, unceasing desires, and generate vigorous efforts, to increase this evangelical character. His faith in Christ, and his disposition to obey his commands, require continual additions of strength; and the peculiar consolation, peace, and hope, which he finds in prayer, and which without prayer he cannot find, call unceasingly upon him to be faithful, steadfast, and fervent, in this duty. A hungry man might as well be expected to abstain from food; or a thirsty man from drink: as a Christian from prayer. Prayer is the breath on which Christianity lives; and from which it derives peculiarly its power, activity, and enjoyment. Mark the manner in which David describes his distress in being cut off from the solemn services of the tabernacle; and the relief, the comfort, the strength, and the joy, which he found when he drew nigh to that holy place. Mark the discourses of our Saviour on this subject, and the most edifying example of performing this duty, which he has left on record for our imitation. Attend diligently to the commands, exhortations, and encouragements, given by St. Paul, to engage us to continue *always in all prayer*. Here you will see, with the most certain evidence, how naturally, and how irresistibly, holiness prompts to the performance of this duty. Such is the spirit by which all Christians are governed, and without which no man can be a Christian. By our fruits are we known both to ourselves and to others. Prayer is the prominent

fruit of the Christian spirit: and, where this fruit is not found, it will be in vain to search for the tree.

From these observations we easily learn the reason, why hypocrites rarely continue steadfast for any length of time in secret prayer. A sinner, under strong conviction of sin, will betake himself of course to his closet. Why will he do this? He is still a sinner, and a stranger to the evangelical character. He finds no part of the Christian's pleasure in things divine; in obedience to God, or the contemplation of his perfections, commands, or designs; in his sabbath, word, or ordinances. Of that relish for spiritual objects, which is implanted in regeneration, and which constitutes what is called the spiritual mind, he is wholly destitute. In seeking salvation, however, he is altogether in earnest; and in seeking the forgiveness of his sins, and the sanctification of his heart, as indispensable means of this most interesting attainment. Hence he prays. But to this character the hypocrite is a stranger; and feels not, therefore, these inducements to prayer.

Still more is he a stranger to the views, affections, and enjoyments, of a Christian. For spiritual objects he has no relish, no desire. In the character of God, the character of Christ, and the nature of religion, he finds no pleasure, and sees no profit; except so far as hypocrisy may increase his reputation, and promote his selfish purposes. For this, his governing end, he will often appear more engaged in religion, when he expects to be seen by men, than Christians themselves. In public and family prayer he will frequently be exact and abundant; because this conduct will gain him the character which he covets. Here others see him. Here, therefore, he finds an advantage sufficient to excite his perseverance in these external services.

But in secret prayer there can be no gain beside that which is spiritual and immortal. No reputation can spring from conduct unknown to men. If, therefore, the hypocrite begins the performance of this duty; he will usually soon desist; because, on the one hand, he has no anxiety about salvation, and on the other, no delight in the duty. Accordingly, Job says of the hypocrite, *Will he delight himself in the Almighty? Will he always call upon God?* that

is, he will *not* always call upon God. He will, at times, call upon God for a little period; but will cease, of course, from this duty, after that period is ended; because he expects from it neither profit nor pleasure.

2dly. *From these observations it is evident also, that he who does not pray is guilty of pre-eminent folly.*

Prayer is the only communication between mankind and their Maker, and the only means of obtaining blessings from him. The man who refuses or neglects to pray, voluntarily cuts himself off therefore from all hope of good. The easiest, least expensive, least burdensome, possible mode of acquiring good, is to ask for it. God has been pleased to constitute this the only mode of obtaining it from him. He therefore who does not pray, cannot rationally hope for any blessing.

To renounce all good, when it is attainable by any means, however difficult, is the conduct of a fool. To renounce it, when the means are the easiest possible, is the conduct of a madman. Such a fool, such a madman, is he, who neglects prayer. To pray, costs neither money, pains, nor time. Why do multitudes in this house neglect to pray? The true explanation of this mysterious, sottish violation of every dictate of reason, conscience, and revelation, is, that all these persons hate their duty. They *sin against God, and wrong their own souls; they hate him, and love death.*

SERMON CXLI.

THE ORDINARY MEANS OF GRACE.

THE USEFULNESS OF PRAYER TO FAMILIES.

Praying always with all prayer.—EPHES. VI. 10.

HAVING considered the *usefulness of prayer to individuals*, I shall now, according to the scheme proposed, examine its *usefulness to families*.

The text, as will be seen by attending to its connexion with the preceding verse, contains a command, in which we are required to *pray always*, εν παντι τω καιρω, *at every season with all prayer;* that is, with prayer of every kind; or prayer offered up to God in every form. By this precept, then, mankind are commanded to pray at every season suited to the performance of this duty; and with such prayer as becomes the circumstances, wants, and characters, of those by whom the duty is to be performed.

That *family prayer* is included in this general direction, as one kind of prayer especially suited to the wants and circumstances of mankind, will not be questioned by most of those who profess the religion of the gospel. Nor will it be doubted, that every morning, and every evening, presents a proper season for the performance of this religious service.

In examining the proposed subject of discourse, it will be useful to consider,

The advantages of performing,

The disadvantages of neglecting, and,

The objections, commonly made against, this duty.

The foundation of family prayer is laid in the intimate connexion of those who are members of these little societies. This connexion necessarily creates a variety of interests, wants, enjoyments, and sufferings, which are com-

mon to them all. United in all these concerns in a very intimate manner, the several members of a family find a common interest in unitedly supplicating upon them the blessing of God, without which neither prosperity nor relief can be expected. A common interest in the source of all communion in the worship of God, whether in families, particular churches, nations, or the Christian world at large. Nor is there any reason against family worship, which does not lie against the worship of churches, and larger Christian communities. Indeed, ancient churches were not unfrequently formed of single families.

Among the *advantages* which attend family prayer, I shall mention the following.

1. *The intimate communion which exists in this worship, naturally renders our devotion intense and exalted.*

Religion is in its nature social. Worship, particularly, is naturally social. Every man, possessed of the spirit of the gospel, feels an interest in those things in which others are alike interested with him, which it is difficult for him to feel in things, even of the same nature, which concern himself only. Nay, selfish as the human heart is, mankind are naturally more affected, on many occasions, by those concerns in which they share with others, than in those which are merely personal. He who would fly, when himself only was attacked, would fight, when an enemy assaulted his family. Many a slothful man has become industrious, many a prodigal prudent, many a parsimonious man generous, and many a light-minded man sober, in consequence of the interest which he took in the affairs of his household.

All the members of a family are connected by the strong bonds of natural affection: bonds, which unite human beings together with a power and intimacy found in no other circumstances of life. The sympathy here experienced is therefore intense and peculiar. The wants and interests are not only common, but near and important; reaching every heart at once, awakening instinctively a lively, vigorous concern, a powerful sympathy, and united efforts, of singular energy and ardour. The members of a family all dwell, also, in the same house; are daily united in one com-

mon system of employments; interchange unceasingly and habitually their kind offices; and are accustomed to rejoice and mourn, to hope and fear, to weep and smile, together. No eloquence, no labour, no time, is necessary to awaken these sympathetic emotions. They are caught at once from eye to eye, and from heart to heart: and spread instantaneously, with an electric influence through all the endeared and happy circle.

In the devotions of this little assembly, parents pray for their children, and children for their parents; the husband for his wife, and the wife for her husband; while brothers and sisters send up their requests to the throne of infinite mercy, to call down blessings upon each other. Who, that wears the name of man, can be indifferent here? Must not the venerable character of the parents, the peculiar tenderness of the conjugal union, the affectionate intimacy of the filial and fraternal relations; must not the nearness of relations long existing, the interchange of kindness long continued, and the oneness of interests long cemented; all warm the heart, heighten the importance of every petition, and increase the fervour of every devotional effort?

The blessings asked for are common to all. The parent, in speaking for one member of the family, speaks, even when he does not directly design it, for every one. For here, as in the natural body, *whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.* These blessings are also indispensable and invaluable. They are no other than the health, union, peace, prosperity, forgiveness, sanctification, and everlasting life, of all this circle of beloved objects. How necessarily then must all the natural affections of the heart, and all the power of religion, conspire to render prayer, thus offered up, eminently fervent and devout! The world, perhaps, does not furnish a single prospect so beautiful, so lovely, to the eye of virtuous contemplation, as a family, thus assembled in the morning for their affectionate devotions; combining the two most charming among all the exercises of the human heart, piety to God their common parent, and tenderness to each other; and living through the day in that course of evangelical conduct, which is pre-eminently suited to so delightful a beginning. No

priest, no minister, is so venerable, as a father; no congregation so dear and tenderly beloved, as a wife and children; and no oblations are offered with the same union, interest, and delight, as those of a pious and affectionate household.

2. *Family prayer eminently contributes to domestic order and regularity.*

The worship of the morning, and of the evening, commences and closes the concerns of the day with an exactness of method almost necessarily diffused through all its concerns. The regular returns of an employment, distinguished by its importance, communicate to the business connected with it, and to those who perform it, a character of regularity, unavoidably felt, and universally prevailing. The worship of God is always of the highest importance. The spirit of religion, which dictates it, is, in its nature, a spirit of order. Its returns take place every morning and every evening, after short intervals, and with exact regularity. Its influence is, therefore, necessarily diffused through the day; operates with an efficacy wholly peculiar; and controls, with a superior authority, both the mind and the life. No influence is equally felt; and no minds are equally prepared to be acted upon by influence. The method established is invested with unrivalled solemnity, enforced by the sanctity of religion, regarded with singular veneration, and submitted to without a question, even in thought. But method is the soul of all business; especially of complicated business; and peculiarly of business in which numbers are concerned. The method here produced is formed with perfect regularity, with supreme ease, without the consciousness of any difficulty, and without a thought of any resistance. Its nature is delightful: its efficacy is complete.

3. *Family worship greatly strengthens parental government.*

In the morning and evening devotion, the parent is invested with the solemn character of a priest of God, a minister of Christ. This character, eminently venerable in itself, adds, in the highest degree, to the personal venerableness and dignity of the parent. When we think of any object, whatever may be its nature, we necessarily associate

with it those ideas, which have customarily been connected with it in our minds. Children naturally regard a parent with reverence. But they cannot fail to reverence a respectable parent more, and a contemptible parent less, on account of his personal character. Whenever they have been accustomed to behold their parent daily sustaining the office of a minister of God; they necessarily associate with every idea, which they form of his person and character, this solemn and important apprehension. Every image of this venerable relation presented to their minds, will include in it that of a divinely-appointed guardian of their spiritual concerns; a guide to their duty, given them from above; a venerated and beloved intercessor for their salvation.

At the same time, the apparent habitual piety, thus exhibited, will persuade the children, that the authors of their being are sincere in all their religious professions, and in their various moral instructions to them; and that they are therefore, in the evangelical sense, virtuous. The evidence furnished in this manner may be, I acknowledge, and often is, overthrown by the sinful conduct even of praying parents. But I see not how this conviction can exist, where parents do not maintain the worship of God in their families. The want of such worship presents to the eye of children a palpable and indubitable inconsistency between their conduct and their professions, which no child can fail to see or feel. An unhappy conviction will here unavoidably spring up in their minds, which cannot be stifled; and which will necessarily lessen the character of the parent, and the weight of his commands: a conviction, that these persons, notwithstanding their venerable name, and their relation to himself, are unpossessed of that singleness of heart, and that integrity of profession, which he cannot avoid regarding as indispensable.

This union in their worship presents also, in a very forcible manner, to the eyes of their offspring, that peculiar union of views and affections, of interests and designs, with respect to the most important of all subjects, and by necessary consequence with respect to every other, without which, it is hardly necessary to observe, no parental government can be successful: and the happy influence

of which is proverbially acknowledged, wherever it is found.

It is unnecessary to insist, here, upon the interesting nature of these subjects. It is unnecessary to shew how indispensable it is, that children should entertain the most reverential thoughts concerning their parents; feel an undoubting conviction of their sincerity in all things; and realize, in the strongest manner, their cordial union in every valuable purpose. I shall only add, therefore, that, from the numerous complaints so often made by parents concerning the difficulty of governing their children, it may fairly be inferred, that all persons sustaining this character, and possessed of common understanding, must consider so efficacious an addition to their authority as of inestimable value.

4. *This worship, in an eminent degree, preserves and promotes religion in a family.*

Whenever a family or an individual observes an exact regularity in performing the duties and celebrating the ordinances of the gospel; religion naturally becomes flourishing and vigorous in their hearts and in their lives. From family prayers both the parents and their offspring go, happily prepared, to the devotions of the closet; and from these devotions return, with the same becoming spirit, to the worship of the house; and from the retired and affectionate services of the week, they proceed, with the best preparation, to the more solemn duties of the sanctuary.

To children and servants, especially, the worship of the house is of incalculable importance. The advantages of both these classes of mankind, for understanding and practising the duties of religion, in many respects, are obviously few and limited: while their minds are imperfectly fitted to make the most advantageous use of such as they enjoy. To increase their number and their power, and certainly not to lessen either, must naturally be the wish of every benevolent man. Among these, the household worship is eminently important. Here, so soon as they are able to understand any thing, they see religion appearing daily, in one of its most affecting forms; celebrated by those, whom nature teaches them most to respect and love; and occupied about interests, which they easily under-

stand, and deeply feel. Under the happy influence of these considerations they grow speedily into fixed habits of thinking reverentially, and believing favourably, concerning religion. The very aspect of the service teaches them, that it holds the uppermost place in the mind of the parent: while a conviction of this truth renders his opinions and conduct more venerable and affecting in those of the children. In these circumstances they naturally feel as if God was always to be worshipped, sought, honoured, and praised; and that his blessing was to be implored in every concern, temporal and spiritual.

A family, habituated in this manner, goes from the house to the church with the most profitable apprehensions concerning the ordinances of the sabbath. Religion, in the view of all its members, wears a solemnity and importance ordinarily not otherwise attainable; and a frame of mind is acquired, most happily susceptible of the best impressions in the house of God.

Thus by prayer in the family, the religion of its members, if they are religious at all, is rendered more sincere, fervent, and efficacious. They are all better beings: better husbands and wives; better fathers and mothers; better children, brothers, and sisters; better masters and servants; than they otherwise would, or in the ordinary course of providence could, be. All the endearing interests of families, all the strong ties, the tender relations, and the vigorous affections, which grow out of this happy union of mankind in these little societies of nature, are in this manner converted into most useful means of promoting the holiness of all.

At the same time, and from the same source, children and servants are furnished with the most powerful persuasives to become holy. Family worship is a primary branch of religious education: as that education is a primary source of religion to mankind; and one of the two great pillars, on which rests the salvation of men. Without family worship, religious education will always be essentially defective; and the instructions, reproofs, and persuasives, suspected at least, if not accounted, insincere.

But holiness is the great interest of all rational beings. In itself it is happiness of the noblest kind. It is also the

parent of all other happiness which is solid and enduring. On family prayer, then, God has founded a great and important part of all the real good of his rational creatures in the present world.

No man can be insensible to this consideration, who is not insensible both to the present and future welfare of his offspring. Almost all parents wish their children to be virtuous here and happy hereafter; and this, even when themselves are vicious. Family prayer is one of the chief means among those, which are placed in the hands of parents, of rendering their children the subjects of holiness, and the heirs of eternal life. The parent therefore, who does not make the utmost use of this mean, always in his power, so easily employed, so obviously fitted to produce the effect, and so fraught with invaluable consequences, ought never to pretend, that he has any real love for his children.

When therefore he sees them sinful, thoughtless, and dissolute; let him, instead of complaining of the difficulty which he finds in governing and reforming his children: instead of quieting himself with the belief, that they are so peculiarly froward, as to frustrate every effort, and discourage every hope; take *shame and confusion of face to himself* for his own guilty negligence. Let him remember, that himself is eminently the cause of their profligacy, and their ruin. Let him tremble, lest the *fury* invoked by *Jeremiah upon the families which called not upon the name of God,* should descend upon his own house, as the proper reward of his own irreligion.

5. *Families have the best reason to expect the blessing of God in answer to their prayers.*

All the promises, and other encouragements, given in the Scriptures to prayer, are addressed to individuals, families, and larger communities, alike. *The effectual fervent prayer of the righteous,* as truly *availeth much* in the household, as in the closet, or the church. The house is the place to ask for family blessings. Here all, concerned in them, unite their humble and fervent requests for the merciful communication. Nations warrantably hope for national blessings, when they join in public supplications to God. The same observation is equally applicable to all inferior societies among mankind. The members of a household are here

the persons interested; the persons who hope to receive; and, therefore, the persons who should ask. They are unitedly to receive; their supplications, therefore, ought to be united. Nor is there any case, in which a gracious answer to prayer may more justly be expected.

Among *the disadvantages which flow from the neglect of family prayer,* may be mentioned *its unhappy influence,*

1. *On domestic order.*

The mind naturally opposes order; and cannot be brought to observe or relish it, unless by influence long exerted, arguments often repeated, and habits slowly and firmly established. Where these advantages do not exist in some good degree, man more resembles a wild beast, than a rational being; is impatient of all regularity, and all restraint; and is precluded alike from all worth, usefulness, and enjoyment. But no means contribute so easily, so powerfully, or so happily, to the establishment of good order in the house, as family worship. I do not deny, that this benefit flows, in various degrees, from other sources. But even these are prevented of no small part of their influence, where this species of prayer is neglected. They are pillars, standing on one side of the building; and incapable of supporting it, because those on the other side are taken away.

2. *On parental government.*

By this neglect, all the advantages already mentioned with reference to this subject, are lost; and all the disadvantages derived from the opposite conduct, are incurred. An irreligious parent cannot fail to be seen by children in an unhappy light. Nor is this any fault in *them.* The most dutiful children will regard him in this manner. Irreligion is in its nature odious and contemptible; and cannot, unless under the influence of strong habitual prejudice, fail to be seen as it is. The conscience of every child will tell him this truth; however affectionate and reverential may be his disposition.

But the parent who is thus viewed by his children, and who gives them reason to view him thus, will find his instructions, reproofs, and punishments, stripped of their principal efficacy. This efficacy is chiefly dependant on

the reverence with which he is regarded: and this reverence, in a higher degree than he will probably be aware, is inseparably dependant on their apprehension, that he is a religious man. But the omission of family worship will necessarily attach to his character, always in some degree, and usually not in a small one, the appearance of irreligion. Even in the most amiable, and in other respects unblamable, men, it will prevent that full conviction, in the minds of children of parental respectability, which it is so desirable that they should entertain. Even this fact will have a considerable and malignant influence upon the government and obedience of children.

3. *On the religion of a family.*

In a family, where such worship does not exist, there is, it must be acknowledged, no appearance of religion. If the parent, a case which rarely happens, should be a religious man; he is not seen to possess this character. Should he appear to sustain it in some things; he is plainly discerned not to sustain it in others; and thus exhibits an inconsistent, vibratory course of life, on which the eye cannot rest with either conviction or pleasure. Such a contradictory character can have little influence in doing good to the minds of children. Whatever desirable efficacy it may possess when viewed on one side; it will impair and destroy when seen on the other.

All professions of religion, all pretensions to being religious, pass for nothing in the minds even of children, when unsupported by a religious life. But, in the present case, the children behold their parent live in the continual neglect of what their consciences naturally declare to be one of the first duties of religion. Hence whatever regard he may testify to this sacred subject; how numerous and how solemn soever his instructions to them may be; his power of making useful impressions on their minds, will in a great measure be prevented. Let it be remembered, that this prevention will be voluntary and wanton. No necessity can be pleaded for it; no advantage alleged; and no excuse found. How solemnly ought parents, who thus causelessly strip themselves and rob their families of these inestimable benefits, to ponder this unhappy course, and

to give themselves neither rest nor peace, until they shall have begun a final reformation.

The *objections* which, within my knowledge, have been alleged against family prayer, or rather which have been intended to excuse the neglect of this duty, are chiefly the following.

1. *The want of an express injunction of it in the Scriptures.*

There is not, I acknowledge, any passage in the word of God which, *in so many terms*, enjoins prayer in the family as a duty, in distinction from other modes of religious worship. Of him who thinks this fact an objection to the performance of this duty, I ask, will you neglect every Christian duty, which you do not find enjoined in express terms? Are you prepared to go through life without dedicating your children to God in baptism? Will you refuse to observe the first day of the week as the Christian sabbath? Do you feel authorized to exclude the female sex from communion at the table of Christ? Yet in vain would you look for precepts, enjoining these things in express terms.

But I deny the inference drawn by the objector from the silence of the Scriptures concerning this subject. Not only is the general principle, that nothing is our duty, which is not expressly required in the Scriptures, false; but the application of it also, even if it were allowed to be true, is, in the present case, incapable of being justified. As the objection itself seems to be generally relied on more than any other; it will be useful to consider the subject of it at length, as it is exhibited in the Scriptures.

Prayer is no where in the Scriptures enjoined as a duty, which was before unknown, and new at the time of the injunction; or as then to be begun. On the contrary, it is always spoken of as a duty, already known, confessed, and practised. All the commands concerning it, respect either the times, manner, degree, spirit, universality, or some other circumstance, with which the performance ought to be connected. In no instance is the duty enjoined as original; or as the subject of a new institution.

The first mention made of this subject in the Scriptures, if we adopt the common translation, is in Gen. iv. 26. Here, after the birth of Enos, it is said, that *then began men to call on the name of the Lord;* that is, mankind then began publicly to worship God in a solemn, religious assembly. I suppose, however, that this translation is erroneous; and believe the words ought to be rendered, *then began men to be called after the name of Lord:* that is, the family of Seth began to be called *the sons of God;* in opposition to the apostate family of Cain, who were styled *the children of men.* See Gen. vi. 2.

According to this opinion, the first passage in which prayer is mentioned, is the prayer of Abraham for Ishmael. Gen. xvii. 18.

The second is his intercession for Sodom. Genesis xviii. 24.

The third is the direction, that Abraham should pray for Abimelech, after his offence in taking away Sarah. This may be considered as a *command.*

The fourth is the declaration, that Isaac *went out into the field to pray in the evening.* Gen. xxiv. 63.

To these may be subjoined, as next in order of time, several instances in the book of Job.

Yea, thou restrainest prayer before God. Job xv. 4.

My prayer is pure. Job xvi. 17.

What profit shall we have, if we pray to him? Words of the wicked. Job xvi. 15.

He shall pray to God, and he will be favourable to him. Job xxxiii. 26.

My servant Job shall pray for you: a command. Job xlii. 8.

The first passage which can be fairly construed as an injunction of prayer in the general sense, is the exhortation of the Psalmist, *Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: that is,* the church at large. Psalm cxxii. 6.

The second is in Jer. xxix. 7. *Seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the Lord for it.*

In all these passages (the whole number of those in which the subject is mentioned, until after the period of the last, which has been quoted) there are *four instances in*

which prayer may be said to *be commanded.* In the two first, individuals are required to pray for individuals, on single and peculiar occasions. In the third, saints are commanded, or rather exhorted, when assembled for public worship, to pray for the peace of the church. In the fourth, prayer is enjoined upon the Jewish captives, for the peace of the city whither they were to be carried. All the other passages are merely circumstantial accounts of the subject.

The first injunction of this duty, the terms of which regard it as in any sense generally obligatory, was given, when the world was about three thousand years old; and the Jewish church about eight hundred. The second about two hundred years afterward.

From these facts I conclude, that it was not the intention of the Scriptures to institute this duty anew in any passage whatever: there being no passage in which it is thus instituted. They took up this subject in the only way which was natural or proper. Men had always prayed from the beginning; and on all occasions confessed prayer to be a duty. Nothing more therefore was necessary, natural, or proper, than to regulate it as a duty already begun, acknowledged, and practised, by mankind. The state of facts demanded only, that the Scriptures should teach the manner, the times, the spirit, the constancy, and the universality, of prayer. Nothing more was necessary; and this is done in the happiest and most effectual manner conceivable.

From this account of the manner in which prayer is treated in the Scriptures, it appears evident, at least to me, that original and particular directions concerning the three divisions of this duty, customarily made in modern times, viz. *secret, family,* and *public prayer,* ought never to have been expected. The circumstances in which the subject is taken up, and the manner in which it is exhibited, forbid every expectation of this nature. The question, whether prayer in secret, in the family, or in public, is a duty of man, was probably never asked, nor the obligation to perform it in either case doubted, during the whole period, from the beginning of the world to the completion of the scriptural canon. Men always prayed on every solemn and proper occasion; in public, in private, and in secret.

When one man had wants of his own, which he wished to spread before God, or blessings which he wished to ask; he performed this duty in secret. When two, twenty, a hundred, or a thousand, had common wants, and wished for common blessings; they united in their devotions; and thus formed a greater or smaller religious assembly. Thus families, thus churches, and thus nations, met together for social prayer and praise, as well as for the purpose of offering social sacrifices.

To this origin are to be referred the family sacrifices of Elkanah and Jesse; and among the Heathen nations, the existence of household gods, and domestic libations. Such gods, derived from the same source, were, in all probability, the Teraphim which Rachel took from Laban. Abraham's family plainly worshipped together: so did the family of Job: so did Christ and his apostles: so did the apostles after his ascension. There were little religious assemblies also in the houses of Aquila and Nymphas; consisting probably of their own households, and of such others as were occasionally present. The whole congregation of Israel, also, assembled at the times specified in the law of Moses, from the days of that lawgiver to the latest period of their national existence. In the same manner worshipped the Christian churches at Jerusalem, Antioch, Rome, and other places.

The truth unquestionably is, prayer was instituted by divine appointment from the creation of man; and was traditionarily spread through all nations as a duty evident to common sense, and acknowledged by the universal voice of mankind. The Gentiles practised it in every form, as did the patriarchs, Jews, and Christians. It was performed by one, few, or many: that is, by all who were interested in the wants felt, and the blessings supplicated; and secretly, privately, or publicly, just as the occasion required.

On this scheme is the text formed: *Pray always with all prayer:* that is, pray on every proper occasion, with prayer suited to that occasion: if the occasion be your own, with the prayer suited to it; *viz.* secret prayer; if your own and that of others also, be they few or many, with prayer suited to every such occasion.

Families are always together at least twice every day;

and every day furnishes at least two occasions to all the members for communion in prayer. All the members, therefore, are required by this precept unitedly to spread their common wants before their Maker, and to ask for blessings in which they have a common interest.

In the same manner are both secret and public prayer enjoined. Neither of these duties is enjoined originally. All the precepts relating to them are employed in regulating the disposition with which, the manner in which, the times at which, they are to be performed; or the modification, or other circumstances pertaining to the performance. Neither of these duties is any where in the Scriptures instituted anew; but both are always spoken of as already existing.

At the same time, several passages of Scripture, beside those already mentioned, refer to this subject in a manner too evident to leave a reasonable doubt, that family worship was their immediate object. When Joshua informs the children of Israel, that *as for him and his house, they will serve the Lord;* he teaches us directly, that they united, and had customarily united, in this service. *The Lord's prayer*, after the manner of which we are directed by Christ to pray, is a social prayer, and seems plainly to have been intended, not for an individual, not for the closet, not for the church, but for the family and the fire-side. In this prayer we are directed to ask for our daily bread, on the day in which the prayer is used. As, therefore, we need, and are bound to ask for, our daily bread, every day, it was plainly designed to be a daily prayer; and could not therefore be intended for the church; since mankind are not, and cannot be, present in the church every day. That it was not intended for the closet is obvious from the fact, that it is addressed to God by more persons than one. That it may with propriety be used both in the church and in the closet, as to its substance, I readily acknowledge: but it was, I think, plainly intended principally for the household. "What a live coal," says Dr. Hunter beautifully, "is applied to devotion, when the solitary *my* father and *my* God, is changed into the social *our* Father and *our* God!" How delightful, let me add, how interesting, how animating, how encouraging, to every amiable and vir-

tuous emotion, for the pair, thus united, to be able to say, and actually to say, "Behold, here are we, and the children whom thou hast given us."

In Zechariah x. 10, the prophet informs us, that, as a commencement of the millennial glory and happiness, the people of Israel shall worship God with peculiar earnestness and devotion, as it is expressed in the Hebrew, *families by families.* In other words, he teaches us, that there shall be a wonderful prevalence of family worship. This also he exhibits as followed by remarkable testimonies of the divine favour, and as crowned with blessings, new in their degree, and eminently glorious in their nature. It is difficult to conceive how God could testify, in a more affecting manner, the peculiar favour with which he regards family religion.

2. *Diffidence and timidity are often alleged as serious objections to the performance of this duty.*

This certainly is a very unhappy excuse for neglecting this duty, and very unfortunately alleged. I should feel myself bound to ask the author of it, "Are you too diffident to perform your customary business? Are you too diffident to pursue customary amusements? Are you too diffident to commit sin? Does the bashfulness, which hinders you from family prayer, hinder you also from censuring and laughing at others who practise it? Does it prevent you from using the language of profaneness? Why should you be timid only concerning the duties of religion? Is there any thing in the nature of this subject, which can reasonably excite shame, or which can fairly excuse you in indulging it? Is it not true, that religion itself is the thing of which you are ashamed?"

Remember, I beseech you, the awful declaration of Christ concerning this subject. *Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed when he shall come in his glory.* Family worship, presented in the name of Christ, is as real a confession of this divine person, as the participation of the sacramental supper.

3. *Inability to pray, to devise proper thoughts, and to find proper expressions, is also no unfrequent objection against the performance of this duty.*

To him who alleges it, I would say, "Have you not wants to be supplied, woes to be relieved, sins to be forgiven, and blessings to be supplicated? Can you not confess your sins, recite your wants and distresses, and mention the blessings which you need? Do you ordinarily find any difficulty in conferring with an earthly friend, or in soliciting aid from an earthly benefactor? Have you, when in earnest, ever found any serious embarrassment in telling others what you needed, or what you desired?"

Wherever religion gains possession of the heart, regular experience proves, that all these difficulties vanish. Nay, where serious conviction of guilt and danger is entertained by the mind, every man who is the subject of it forgets at once both his inability and bashfulness. Is it not evident, then, that the true reason why these things have such unhappy influence over you is, that you have no proper regard for religion, find no just sense, either of your guilt, or your need of forgiveness?

At the same time, these difficulties are incomparably more formidable in prospect than in reality. As you approach them, they vanish. Thousands and millions, originally neither wiser nor better than you, neither less timid nor less embarrassed, have got over them all. Certainly then you may achieve the same victory.

4. *Multitudes allege also, as a serious objection to the performance of this duty, that they shall meet from their families nothing but opposition, censure, and ridicule.*

To the author of this objection I should answer, that it is usually, if not always, founded in mistake. Children are by nature prepared to reverence religion. The conscience of man, before it has been warped and overpowered by passion, prejudice, and sin, prompts him, of course, to regard this solemn and awful object, only with the emotions of respect. So obvious is this truth, that it has often been acknowledged by infidels. Children, therefore, present no obstruction to the performance of this duty.

Whatever may be true of other countries, it is certainly true in this, that the number of women is extremely small who discourage in any manner, which may be styled direct, the ordinances of religion. From them, therefore, no

hinderance will be presented to this duty, unless in cases of a very extraordinary nature. The difficulty then which is here alleged, is in almost every case created solely by the man himself.

I would farther ask this objector, have you made the experiment? If not, where is your proof of its truth? If you have, have you attempted to remove it; and, like a wise and good man, determined to govern your family, and subdue so unreasonable a spirit?

This evil is oftener feared than felt. It is doubtful whether the man can be found, who, after a faithful trial, has been prevented by it from the regular worship of God in his family.

There is another objection, which, though perhaps never alleged in form, has had no small weight in particular cases. It is this: the persons in question have long neglected it, and feel extreme reluctance to exhibit to their families their inconsistency of character. Concerning this objection I shall only observe, that it lies equally against all reformation; and, if yielded to, would effectually prevent every sinner from becoming a Christian.

Upon the whole, all these objections are either erroneous or nugatory; either devised or adopted, by a mind already willing to neglect the duty; and fastened upon, as the best means within its reach, to quiet its own conscience, and to justify its conduct in the sight of others.

SERMON CXLII.

THE ORDINARY MEANS OF GRACE.

THE USEFULNESS OF PRAYER TO COMMUNITIES. ITS EFFICACY IN PROCURING BLESSINGS. ENCOURAGEMENTS TO PRAYER.

It is good for me to draw near unto God.
PSALM LXXIII. 28.

IN the last discourse, I considered *the usefulness of prayer to families.* The next thing proposed for discussion was, *its usefulness to communities.*

It may be proper to remind my audience, that the usefulness of prayer was originally mentioned as *twofold;* consisting,

1. *In its immediate influence on the suppliant;* and,
2. *Its efficacy in procuring blessings.*

It may be proper farther to observe, that, next to *the usefulness of prayer,* I proposed to examine *the encouragements to this duty.* These three subjects will be considered in the present discourse.

In the text, the Psalmist declares, that *it was good for him to draw near to God.* If it was good, that is, profitable, for the Psalmist to perform this duty; it must without question be equally profitable to every other individual who prays with the same spirit. There was nothing in the character of David which rendered prayer more beneficial to him, than it may be to others. He prayed frequently, faithfully, and earnestly. All who pray in the same manner, will find the same benefits. Nor will this usefulness be in any degree lessened by *the communion of multitudes* in this solemn service. On the contrary, it will be increased. The power of sympathy cannot fail to enhance the fervour of prayer, when offered up to God by numerous

bodies of mankind. Whatever advantages then result from prayer, generally considered, whether offered up in the closet or in the family, all these will result from the prayer of communities. Beside these, public prayer is accompanied by several advantages, in a greater measure peculiar to itself. Particularly,

1. *Public worship is in a prime degree constituted of public prayer.*

The benefits of public worship I have considered at large in a former discourse. All these benefits are not, I confess, derived solely from public prayer. They are however so connected with it, as in a remoter sense to be justly attributable to its proper influence. It seems scarcely probable, that without public prayer, the other ordinances of public worship would be celebrated at all; or the sabbath itself at all observed. If we did not feel our dependance upon God for all good, and the absolute necessity of deriving and asking it from him; there would apparently be no motives of sufficient efficacy to preserve public worship in the world. If public prayer were to cease, the sabbath, it is to be feared, would be forgotten, and the sanctuary deserted.

These things being admitted, it follows, that all the blessings above mentioned are derived from public prayer; not indeed immediately, but ultimately. On their importance I need not now expatiate.

2. *Public prayer, above all things, preserves alive a sense of national dependance on God.*

The prime mean of preserving in the mind of an individual a sense of his own dependance on his Maker is, confessedly, prayer: as has been shewn at large in a preceding discourse. On families and on nations its influence is the same. No human emotion has a more advantageous influence on the mind than this. It affects men deeply in all stations and circumstances; and affects them all happily. It is a feeling perfectly just; and the only just feeling respecting the subject. It is a feeling of high importance: it is a feeling of the most useful tendency.

On rulers its influence is that, and only that, which they need to incline them to *rule justly, and in the fear of God.* A ruler who feels his dependance on his Maker will be just,

of course; because he knows that God is just, and demands exact justice of him; because he knows that God is an eye-witness of all his conduct; and because he knows he must give an account of that conduct, and be rewarded according to its nature. If he does that which is right, he is assured of acceptance; if not, *sin*, he is equally assured, *will lie at his door*.

With such a sense of his dependance, a ruler will be *merciful* also; because he knows that God is merciful, that he loves those who are merciful, and requires mercy of all men, and peculiarly of rulers; because he knows, that *mercy and truth uphold the throne of a king*, and the office of every other ruler: and because he knows that, in the end, he himself will infinitely need mercy, that God has pronounced the *merciful blessed*, and promised that *they shall obtain mercy*, and has awfully declared, that *he shall have judgment without mercy, who sheweth no mercy*.

With this sense of dependance also a ruler will be *humble*. In the sight of God every man, however high his station, however extensive his power, is merely a *worm of the dust*, and *crushed before the moth*. To a being so frail, so feeble, so dependant, pride cannot belong. His own littleness cannot fail to stare him in the face, whenever he remembers, that every thing which he has, or is, or will be, has been, and must be, solely derived from God; and for its continuance must depend solely on his pleasure. It is impossible for a mind fraught with these sentiments, not to forget the haughtiness of power, and the splendour of station. At the same time, a ruler thus disposed, will ever call to mind, that *the poor in spirit*, *the meek*, and *the humble*, are the only persons to whom good is promised in the gospel. *The haughtiness of man*, it is there declared, *shall be brought low*, and *the pride of all* human *glory shall be stained*. It is there declared, that every *proud* man *is an abomination to the Lord*, and *shall be stubble* for the final day.

It is scarcely necessary to observe, how important these attributes are to every ruler, or how beneficial they invariably prove to subjects. With such a character the ruler cannot fail to be equitable in his laws and administrations, reasonable in his exaction and management of public pro-

perty, clement in the distribution of justice, conscientious in the performance of every duty, and universally *a minister of God for good* to his people.

A corresponding influence equally happy will the same sense of dependance have on those who are ruled. The same general conscientiousness will prevail in their minds; a scrupulous obedience to all laws and lawful authority; and a steady attachment to the good order and peace, secured by a wise administration.

Men formed to sentiments and habits of this nature, are almost wholly a different kind of beings from those to whom such sentiments are unknown. The motives by which these two classes of men are governed, are totally diverse. Those of the former class are swayed by the fear and love of God, a disposition to obey him, the dictates of conscience, the hope of final approbation, and the dread of final ruin. Those of the latter class are influenced only by present selfish considerations; and universally inquire how much they shall gain by submission to government, or how much they shall lose by revolt. The former obey rulers, are just and kind to each other, and perform all the duties owed to their fellow-men, from conscience and principle. The latter, so far as they perform these duties at all, perform them from convenience only. On the former class, full reliance may be uniformly placed. To the latter, no confidence can safely attach, except when their duty and their selfishness coincide. The obedience of the former is voluntary; that of the latter, mercenary and venal.

Between rulers and subjects, governed by this sense of dependance on their Maker, arises of course a universal confidence. In a country thus influenced, the government can therefore easily, and will naturally, be mild and gentle. In every other it must ultimately be a system of coercion, an administration of force. Society in such a country is established on sounder principles, is formed with juster views, and assumes a nobler character. It is the society of reason, of friendship, of virtue, of piety. Every thing in the understanding, the heart, and the life, is more accordant with the commands of God, and therefore with truth and rectitude. The bonds which bind the society together are stronger; the trespasses against human happiness are

fewer, and less atrocious; the punishments inflicted by the magistrate are milder, and more rare; and the safety, comfort, and prosperity, enjoyed, are more absolute, uniform, and entire.

Of all these blessings, prayer, both public and private, is in such a sense the source, that without it they never existed in this corrupt world, and never will exist. Nor will their extent ever fail to be proportioned to the prevalence of this duty.

I have now finished the observations which I intended, concerning *the usefulness of prayer by its proper influence on the suppliant.* The next subject which demands our attention, according to the plan proposed is, its *efficacy in procuring blessings from God.*

Every considerate man will see infinite motives inviting him to pray, when he discerns that prayer will of course make him a wiser and a better man, recommend him to the approbation and favour of God, and prepare him to receive blessings from his hands; when he perceives, that in praying he has become obedient to a high and solemn command, and more attempered to the spirit and character of heaven. These are the most estimable of all blessings: and, as they are blessings of such import in themselves, and extend throughout eternity, their value it is plain cannot be measured.

But to many minds, *the hope of being actually answered, and directly blessed with good of some extraneous kind, not inwrought in the present character, and distinct from personal improvement and distant fruition,* is usually a still more powerful persuasive to prayer. Some persons would be moved by this consideration, who would imperfectly feel the other, great and obvious as it appears. It is also a consideration founded in truth and reality; and for both reasons merits a place in this system of discourses.

If I am not deceived, the following observations will place it in a convincing light.

1. *From the influence which prayer has naturally on the suppliant, there is no small probability, that God will grant blessings in answer to the petitions of those who faithfully perform these duties.*

From the observations made in a former discourse concerning the influence which prayer has on the suppliant, it is evident, that by the faithful performance of this duty he is in all respects made a fitter recipient of blessings, than he can be otherwise. No rational doubt can be entertained, that God will bestow his blessings on such as are thus fitted to receive them, rather than on such as are not. It is evidently proper, that he should regard with compassion and kindness, and that he should communicate good to, those who feel their dependance on him; acknowledged his sufficiency and disposition to supply their wants; humbly besought his mercy; realized their own undeserving character; and were grateful to him for every blessing which they received; when with equal propriety he would refuse the same blessings to men, who felt no dependance but on themselves; who were too indifferent, too lazy, or too proud, to ask; who questioned his right to require, and their own obligation to perform, this duty; or who were too ungrateful to acknowledge *their own* indebtedness to him for the mercies which they received, or *his* goodness in bestowing them. Were God to pursue any other course of administration, it is difficult to conceive how he could act as a moral governor, and secure without coercion the obedience of his subjects.

2. *The instances are numerous in which blessings are actually given in answer to prayer.*

I am well aware of the objection which lies against this doctrine. It may, I am sensible, be always said in reply, that we know not whether the same blessings would not have descended, if prayers had not been offered up for them. Without the aid of revelation, I acknowledge, this cannot be known with certainty; since he who gives blessings is the only being who originally knows the reason for which he gives them. Still, from the course of providence merely, the probability is strong, that the blessings in question are given only in answer to prayer. In support of this assertion I observe, that blessings have in many instances been given after fervent prayers have ascended to God, when none but God could have contributed to their existence; when they were utterly unattainable by any human efforts; after all such efforts had been made without suc-

cess; after all hope of obtaining them, except by prayer, had vanished; and when, *Give us help from trouble, for vain is the help of man*, had become the only language seriously thought of by those who were concerned. Of such instances I could easily mention a considerable number. Many more, there is every reason to believe, are remarked by every observing religious man. Many more still would, I doubt not, have been remarked, if religious men were more observant, and prayer were more continually and faithfully performed.

It will be said still, that even these blessings might have been given, had they not been supplicated. To this suggestion of possibility the proper answer is, "They might not." We know they were not given without prayer; and have not a shadow of reason to conclude, that if they had not been prayed for, they would ever have been given. The suggestion therefore is useless to the purpose for which it is made.

But the complete proof lies in this; that certain blessings are not given to men who do not pray; and those blessings of the highest importance. Such are, peace of conscience, *joy in the Holy Ghost*, the *hope* which *maketh not ashamed*, increase of grace, and final perseverance in piety. These are the best of all blessings: and these are never found by those who do not pray. They are also blessings which none but God can give. As therefore they are given to those only who pray, so they are plainly given as an answer to prayer.

At the same time I am bound, as an inhabitant of New-England, solemnly to declare, that were there no other instances to be found in any other country, the blessings communicated to this, would furnish ample satisfaction concerning this subject to every sober, much more to every pious, man. Among these the *destruction of the French armament under the Duke D'Anville in the year* 1746, ought to be remembered with gratitude and admiration, by every inhabitant of this country. This fleet consisted of forty ships of war; was destined for the destruction of New-England; was of sufficient force to render that destruction, in the ordinary progress of things, certain; sailed from Chebucto in Nova-Scotia for this purpose; and was entirely destroyed

on the night following a general fast throughout New-England by a terrible tempest. Impious men, who *regard not the work of the Lord, nor the operation of his hands,* and who for that reason are finally destroyed, may refuse to *give God the glory* of this most merciful interposition. But our ancestors had, and it is to be hoped their descendants ever will have, both piety and good sense sufficient to *ascribe to* JEHOVAH *the greatness, and the power, and the victory, and the majesty;* and to *bless the Lord God of Israel for ever and ever.*

3. *The Scriptures put this subject out of doubt, by declaring directly, that blessings are given to mankind in answer to prayer.*

To prevent any misapprehension concerning the views now to be exhibited of this subject, I observe, that I do not consider prayer as meriting, in any case, the blessings which are given to the suppliant. All blessings are bestowed upon man by the unmerited mercy of God; as is unanswerably evident from the fact, that men universally are sinners; and deserve of course nothing but punishment.

Nor do I intend that the prayers of men change at all the views, dispositions, or purpose, of God, *the Father of lights, from whom cometh down every good and perfect gift, is without variableness, or shadow of turning.* No suppliant, therefore, is encouraged to pray by an expectation, or a possibility, of producing the least change in the glorious object of his prayers.

But I intend that prayer is, in this sense, the means of procuring blessings; viz. *that without prayer the blessings would never be obtained.*

In the immutable counsels of God it is established, that there shall be an inseparable connexion between humble, faithful prayer, and the blessings needed by this suppliant. Prayer is therefore as regular, nay, more regular, a cause of blessings, than ploughing and sowing, rain and sunshine, are of the harvest.

In support of this supposition, I shall now allege several passages of Scripture, sufficient, in my view, to establish the doctrine beyond reasonable debate.

The only condition upon which mankind receive any blessings, is given us by our Saviour in that remarkable pas-

sage: *Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.* As asking is here made the condition of receiving; it is plain, that if we perform not this condition, we are assured that we shall not receive.

Again. *Verily, verily, I say unto you, that whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you.* John xvi. 23. Here the promise is unlimited, as to the good which is asked; and absolute, as to the certainty of receiving it. More cannot be expressed nor desired. Again. *Whatsoever we ask, we receive of him.* 1 John iii. 22. Quotations of this nature need not be multiplied.

As proof that prayer is not offered up in vain, I allege Isaiah xlv. 19, *I said not to the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me in vain.* In this passage God declares, that it was no part of his declarations to Israel, that they sought him or prayed to him in vain. Of consequence it was no part of his counsels with respect to that people. But the counsels of God towards his people, in the different ages of the world, are in substance the same. It is now as true as it was when this prophecy was uttered, that they never seek, that they never pray, in vain.

The prevailing power of prayer is directly, as well as strongly, asserted by St. James. *The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.*

Is any sick, says the same apostle, *let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him. And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up. If he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.*

To illustrate all these declarations, St. James adduces the example of Elijah, who, although a *frail man,* like others, *prayed earnestly that it might not rain, and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.* These great effects, it is to be remembered, were consequences of the prayers of a single man.

After the glorious prediction communicated to Ezekiel concerning the return of the Jews to their own land in the

latter days, a prediction delivered in absolute terms by God himself, the same great Being declares, *Yet for all this will I be inquired of*, that is, prayed to, *by the house of Israel, to do it for them.* Absolute as the promises of these vast blessings were, still the blessings were to be given only in answer to the prayers of the recipients.

Among the divine promises concerning the millennial happiness, this is a remarkable one. *My house shall be called a house of prayer for all people.* From this great fact will arise inseparably the happiness itself. Without such a universal spirit of prayer as is here predicted, the peculiar blessings of that singular period would never exist; for then, as in all preceding periods, the only ordinance of God concerning this subject will be, *Ask, and ye shall receive.*

From all these passages, it is I think unanswerably evident, that prayer is entirely efficacious to procure blessings from God.

It ought here to be farther observed, that we are not to expect any thing in answer to our prayers which is not agreeable to the will of God. Nor ought we to wish any thing which is not of this nature to be given to us; for nothing else will prove a blessing. Whatever is right and proper to be done, is a part of the divine will.

Nor ought we to expect the very same kinds or measures of good for which we pray. Often these would not be good for us; or if good for us at all, they would not be so at the times and in the manner in which we ask for them. Good will always be given in answer to our prayers; but it will be real good, such as God sees to be good, and not such as we erroneously may imagine to be of this nature.

REMARKS.

1. *All persons have abundant encouragement to pray to God.*

This was originally proposed as a distinct head of discourse. I have chosen to introduce it in this form, because it grows so naturally out of the two preceding heads, and because it has of necessity been anticipated in the consideration of them. *The usefulness of prayer, by its own pro-*

per influence, and by its efficacy in procuring blessings from God, are prime *encouragements to the performance of this duty.*

The certain prospect of becoming better, wiser, more lovely in the sight of God, and more fitted to receive blessings from his hands, and of actually gaining the blessings by known, limited, and easy efforts, is a combination of the highest and noblest motives which can influence a rational being. To every suppliant these motives are continually presented. They are presented by God himself; they are established by his undeceiving declarations; they are obvious to our own reason; they are therefore real, and ought plainly to have their full influence on every reasoning mind. The good in view is the greatest good. Nay, there is no other real good. It is good in certain reversion for every suppliant.

In support of this scheme may be alleged, as full evidence, the numerous examples in which these great consequences of prayer have actually existed; examples faithfully recorded in the Scriptures for our encouragement in this duty.

Abimelech received an entire deliverance from the distresses in which his family were involved, as an answer to the prayer of Abraham.

As an answer to the prayers of Abraham also, God assured him, that if ten righteous men should be found in the cities of the plain, he would spare those cities, and not consign them to the punishment which their sins had so eminently deserved.

In answer to the prayer of Job, God forgave the sin and folly of his three friends in not speaking of him the thing which was right.

At the prayer of Moses, the Israelites were not only delivered from many other evils, but preserved also from utter extinction.

At the prayer of Gideon, the dew fell on the ground and not on the fleece; and again on the fleece and not on the ground; that he might know the will of God, and be satisfied that he acted under a divine commission.

At the prayer of Samuel, the Lord thundered on the army of the Philistines, and wrought a great salvation for Israel.

At the prayer of Hezekiah, his life was lengthened fifteen years.

In answer to the prayer of Daniel, Gabriel was sent from the highest heavens to explain the wonderful and distressing vision disclosed to him concerning future times.

As an answer to the prayers of Cornelius, an angel was sent to direct him to send for Peter, who should *teach him words, whereby he and all his* house *should be saved.*

The apostles lived on prayer, and received continually many great and wonderful blessings as immediate answers to their prayers.

To these and other examples of the same nature recorded in the Scriptures, may be added the commands, parables, and promises, which every where enjoin, explain, and enforce, this great duty.

To all these things may also be added the perfect example of the Lord Jesus Christ, *who in the days of his flesh offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears, unto him that was able to save him from death; and was heard in that he feared:* or, as the Greek may well be rendered, *on account of his piety.* This example unites all motives. It is a perfect pattern to us, as being perfectly conformed to the will of God. It is a clear proof that no being in a dependant state, however excellent, is exempted from this duty, or from the universal law of God's providence, which connects blessings only with prayer. If God would have blessed any being without prayer, he certainly would have blessed Christ. As certainly Christ, had such been the fact, would not have prayed; since his prayers in that case would have been a vain and useless service. The will of his Father he certainly knew, and prayed only because it was agreeable to his will. Accordingly his prayers were heard, and always heard. This example also has the entire force of a command, and is invested with divine authority. If then we obey, and follow him in this great duty, we shall do that which is right in the sight of God, as he did; shall be accepted for his sake, as he was accepted; and shall be renewed and blessed, as he was.

In these things thus combined, there is plainly all possible encouragement to pray, and to *continue steadfast in prayer. The Father of all mercies* regards us in this in-

stitution as his children; prepares us by this duty most happily to realize his character as *the Giver of every good and perfect gift;* and fits us in the best manner also to receive his blessings when they are bestowed. He forms *us* to the spirit and conduct of children; and is *himself* ready to give good things of all kinds to us when we thus ask him. In our petitions we learn the nature and value of his blessings, our own absolute need of them, and his unspeakable goodness in furnishing them for our enjoyment. We learn to depend on him; to trust in him; and to exercise towards him unceasing love, reverence, gratitude, and praise. At the same time we are assured that we shall never ask in vain.

2. *From these considerations I urge anew the folly and sin of those who neglect prayer.*

Prayer is the avenue to all good, temporal and eternal; and to us the only avenue. He who will not pray therefore, shuts up the only passage which has been opened for him by God to the attainment of happiness. It may be alleged here, but it will be alleged to no purpose, that multitudes who do not pray are as prosperous as those who do. *An ox is pampered; but it is only for the slaughter.* The enjoyments of this life are never blessings to him that does not pray. If they are merely means of luxury, hardness of heart, and grossness of life, he who enjoys them will only *treasure up wrath against the day of wrath.* On the part of God indeed they are always kindly given; but on the part of the recipient they are regularly abused by being made incentives to sin. They are therefore curses to him by his own perversion; and are styled blessings only by an abuse of language.

Without prayer there is no virtue; no piety; no obedience to God. The commencement of piety in Saul of Tarsus was thus announced by the HOLY GHOST; *Behold he prayeth.* But without piety there is no blessing reserved for man. He may indeed be rich, and great, and luxurious; *may be clothed in purple and fine linen; and* may *fare sumptuously every day.* Such was the condition of the rich man in the parable. But at the end of a short life, *he lifted up his eyes in hell, being in torment;* and found that he had *received all his good things in this life.*

What excuse then can be devised for the neglect of prayer? Is it a hard service? Be it so. Is not the reward sufficiently great to retribute the toil? Good in hand, of every kind which is real and desirable, and good to come, inestimable and endless, are certainly deserving of any labour or suffering which men can undergo. However severe may be the labour of performing the duty, the compensation is certainly ample and complete.

But is it more severe than the daily toil of laborious men? This you yourselves see cheerfully undergone, merely for the common gains of avarice, by millions who do not and cannot know that those gains will be good at all. To every sincere suppliant *all things work together for good.* How vast the difference in these rewards!

Is it harder than profane swearing and cursing? In them, as in prayer, all the labour which exists, exists only in the utterance of words: and multitudes in these evil practices expend much more time and breath than is demanded in prayer. All these also *labour in vain, and spend their strength for nought.* Nay, what is infinitely worse, they labour only to be *poor, and wretched, and miserable.*

But is it hard at all? Is it a hard condition for the attainment of all good, to ask it; and above all things, to ask it of the infinitely blessed and bountiful God?

It has been, and undoubtedly will be again, objected by multitudes, some of them probably in this audience, that they cannot pray. Let me ask those who make this objection, Have you tried? tried, I mean, in earnest? You will be obliged to answer in the negative. You have never seriously attempted to perform this duty. Whence then do you know that you cannot pray? How do you know, that God will not willingly do for you whatever you find it impossible or difficult to do for yourselves? He is infinitely willing to give, in answer to your prayers. Whence have you learned that he is not willing to befriend you in your attempts to pray?

The truth is, you do not choose to make such attempts. You have wants endlessly numerous, and incalculably important. They might be supplied; but you will not ask God to supply them. You have souls of infinite value. They might be saved; but you will not ask God to save.

them.' You are sinners, and exposed to perdition. From these tremendous evils you might be delivered; but will not ask God to deliver you. You are made candidates for heaven: and might be received into that glorious world of everlasting joy. Rather than pray you choose to perish.

All blessings are opened for your enjoyment. The condition on which you may obtain them all, is *to ask*. No sacrifice, expense, or loss, is demanded of you. None will be incurred. On the contrary, praying is in itself unspeakable gain and solid pleasure; higher, more rational, more unmingled pleasure, than you ever found or ever will find in sin. The condition therefore is a gainful condition of a reward without bounds and without end. What then is your conduct but supreme and unmingled folly?

Fools, saith Solomon, *despise wisdom and instruction, and hate knowledge.* This wisdom of supreme import has been taught to you a thousand times. Hitherto you have despised and hated it. The evil of neglecting prayer has been often urged on you; but hitherto it has been urged in vain. Hitherto you have deceived yourselves with the folly of believing, that God will bless you while you refuse to pray to him; in other words, that he will bless you in direct contradiction to his own express declarations. What specimen of folly can be greater? That you should be thus deceived with your present character, is not strange: since the Scriptures inform us, that it is the nature of *folly* to *be deceitful.*

That you should think yourselves right in these views, and in the conduct which grows out of them, is as little strange: for persons of this character, according to the same divine testimony, usually *think themselves right.* But let me remind you from the same sacred book, that *fools die for want of wisdom.* In your present course, you are in the road to death. For want of wisdom only do you continue in it a single day. Should the same folly be prolonged, the period is not distant when you will die for ever.

SERMON CXLIII.

THE ORDINARY MEANS OF GRACE.

THE OBJECTIONS TO PRAYER CONSIDERED.

What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? and what profit shall we have, if we pray unto him?—JOB XXI. 15.

THE *five first subjects*, originally proposed as themes of discourse concerning the duty of prayer, have been examined at length in the four preceding sermons. The sixth, viz. *objections against this duty*, will now occupy our attention.

In the text, a general objection is made against all obedience to God; and is professedly founded on his character. *What is the Almighty, that we should serve him?* There is nothing in the character of God, nor in our relation to him, which requires our obedience to his will. We are neither obliged by any duty, nor drawn by any interest, to his service. This impious sentiment is exhibited in the context as the sentiment of abandoned men only; and is plainly of a nature too impious to be uttered by any other. The following one, proceeding from the same mouth also, is with perfect propriety exhibited to us as resulting from the same spirit. Yet there are multitudes who are far from deserving the character of profligacy, who yet say concerning God, *What profit shall we have, if we pray to him?* This objection, it will be observed, is a *universal one*. *What profit shall we have?* that is, we shall not be profited at all, either in our minds or in our circumstances. We shall not be profited by the proper influence of prayer on ourselves, nor by its efficacy in procuring blessings from God. All objections against prayer may be justly regarded as being summed up in this single question.

It cannot however be expected, that on this occasion every objection, which an irreligious mind can devise against this duty, will be taken up and refuted. Several such objections have been anticipated in the preceding

discourses. Of such as remain, I shall examine those only which may be supposed to have some real weight in the mind of a sober man. These, so far as I recollect them, respect the

Predetermination,
Immutability,
Knowledge, and
Wisdom, of God; and,
The supposed vanity and presumption of prayer.

I shall consider them in their order.

The two first of these subjects are commonly united in the scheme of the objector: and may therefore with propriety be here considered together. If God be a *changeable being;* although he may have predetermined all things, yet he may be supposed to alter his plans in consequence of requests presented to him by his intelligent creatures; and may therefore be addressed as a changeable being. On the other hand, if God be *immutable,* and yet have formed no system of things in his own mind; he may perhaps constitute his designs, from time to time, with some degree of conformity to their supplications.

The first objection which I shall mention, and which is derived from these sources, is usually stated in terms like the following.

"Prayer is fruitless, or, in the language of the text, unprofitable, because all things are determined from everlasting by an immutable God, and will therefore take place according to his determination. Hence our prayers, making no alteration in any thing, must be an idle, perhaps an impious, service: idle, because they can effect nothing; impious, because they are expressions of our desires for blessings which God has not chosen to give. If God has determined to give us these blessings, we shall receive them without prayer. If he has determined not to give them, we shall not receive them, however fervently we may pray. So far then as we pray for things which God has determined to give, our prayers are useless. So far as we pray for those which he has determined not to give, our prayers are directly opposed to his pleasure."

I have endeavoured to state this objection at full length, because I wish to present it with all the force which it has

or can have in the mind of the objector. To the several things contained in it, I answer,

1. *There cannot possibly be any impiety in prayer offered up in the manner stated in these discourses.*

The original definition which I gave of prayer, and with which all the subsequent accounts of it have accorded, is that of the Westminster assembly of divines: *That prayer is an offering up of our desires to God for things agreeable to his will.* To desire that, and that only, which is agreeable to the will of God, cannot be impious. Evangelical prayer supposes, in its very nature, that we ask either for those things for which the Scriptures have expressly permitted us to pray; or for those which we professedly submit to his will in our petitions. In this conduct impiety cannot exist. On the contrary, no human being was ever the subject of piety who did not pursue this conduct.

The objection is now reduced to a single article; viz. *The fruitlessness of prayer; or its inefficacy to change the purposes of God, and therefore to procure blessings.* To this I answer,

2. *This objection lies with exactly the same force against every other human effort, as against prayer.*

If the predetermination and immutability of God render it improper for men to pray, because their prayers cannot change his purposes; then the same things must render it equally improper for men to plough, sow, reap, or make any other effort, for any end whatever. All these, without the divine blessing, will be in vain; and can no more change the purpose of God than prayer. With just the same propriety and force may the *farmer* say, "It is in vain for me to plough, sow, or reap: since, if God has determined to give me a crop, I shall have it without either of these efforts. On the contrary, if he has determined not to give me a crop; I shall not have it, however faithfully I may labour. My ploughing, sowing, and reaping, therefore, must be all idle, because they will all be fruitless."

In the same manner may *the student* say, "If God has determined that I should possess learning, I shall possess it without study; but if he has determined that I shall not possess learning, I shall not acquire it, although I study with ever so much diligence."

In the same manner may every man say concerning his exertions.

This reasoning, were we governed by it, would plainly put an end to all human exertions at once: and we should neither plough, nor build, nor collect food or fuel; nor teach, nor study, nor make any other attempt to promote the good either of ourselves or others. Conclusions so evidently false as these, and so fraught with necessary mischief, cannot flow from sound principles. Safely therefore may we pronounce the proofs by which they are professedly established, to be hollow and deceitful.

3. *There is a radical and gross error in this objection*; viz. *that God has predetermined the end, and not the means.*

This opinion is equally contradictory to the Scriptures and to common sense. St. Paul, a little before his shipwreck, was informed by an angel, that God had *given him all them that sailed with him.* Yet afterward, when *the shipmen were about to flee out of the ship; when they had let down the boat into the sea; Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, Except these abide in the ship ye cannot be saved.* Acts xxvii. 22. 30, 31. The end here determined was the preservation of the ship's company. The means indispensable to this end were, the continuance of the seamen in the ship, and their exertions to bring it to land. These were predetermined equally with the end; and were absolutely necessary to its existence. Equally necessary are ploughing and sowing, rain and sunshine, to the existence of a crop; studying, to the acquisition of knowledge; and all other efforts of men, to the purposes which they actually accomplish. All these are equally predetermined with the ends accomplished, and equally parts of the divine system.

Another error is involved also in the same objection; *viz.* that God bestows blessings upon mankind, which are not given in answer to prayer. Of such a determination there is not, and there cannot be, any evidence. The Scriptures decisively teach us, that the only condition of *receiving* is *asking.* Prayer therefore, as means to the end, that is, the reception of blessings, is itself a part, and an inseparable part, of the predetermined plan of God. When any man considers how useful prayer is to form us into a fitness for the reception of blessings; he will easily discern

one great and solid reason of this divine constitution of things.

There is no moral subject concerning which mankind appear to have fallen into more and greater errors, than concerning this. The character of God, with respect to both these subjects, is undoubtedly far removed, in many particulars, above our comprehension. In several others, it seems to be capable of a satisfactory illustration to a sober mind not unwilling to be satisfied. Nothing is more certain than that, if God ever was, is, or will be, the subject of any determinations, he must have formed them from eternity. In him *there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning*. Of course he can never be the subject of any new determinations. He can have no new ideas, thoughts, or views. *All his works were known to him from the beginning.* This is certain even to reason; for all his works were contrived by him, and therefore were unquestionably known. Hence, no being and no event can be any thing but what he contrived and knew. As he is perfectly the same; as the being and the event, in each case, is also invariably the same as when originally contemplated by him; whatever choice or preference he originally experienced, must for ever be his invariable choice or preference. If therefore he did not originally determine, choose, or prefer, he certainly never will.

Farther; The existence of God is one unvarying present existence; and his duration an eternal now, without past or future; nearer in its nature to one indivisible moment of our existence, than to any thing else which we experience or know. *He* literally *inhabits eternity*, or fills it all at once; just as he fills immensity at once, and not successively its several parts. When therefore we say, that God predetermined all things, it is as true, in a metaphysical sense, that he determines them after, as before, their existence. In strict truth, there is no proper comparison between our successive being, and the unchanging existence of God. One thing only is present to us at any present time. Every thing and every time is absolutely present to God. His creation and providence, together with all their beings and events, are always before *his* view, as a picture containing many images is present before *ours*.

Every part of God's predetermination is founded on exactly the same reasons with those on which the same determination would be founded, if all beings and events had already existed; and God, in possession of the same omniscience, should then survey them with a perfect discernment of their natures and relations, form his own determinations concerning them, and pronounce, with respect to every one, his unerring judgment. Of course, his predeterminations are exactly the same with such determinations as would exist in his mind after every thing had taken place; and are all exactly just and right; such as perfect wisdom and goodness, understanding them entirely, would dictate and approve.

Nor is the *immutability* of God at all more liable to objections. God from everlasting was exactly what all beings ought to wish him to be; possessed of every excellence in an infinite degree, and the subject of no imperfection, either natural or moral. He knows and ever knew all things, both actual and possible. He can do all things; and is infinitely disposed to do every thing, and that only which is absolutely right and good. Consequently there *is* nothing, there never has been, there never will be any thing, which, considered merely as a work of God, is not exactly right. In that vast kingdom which fills immensity and eternity, there will never exist a single being or event, which perfect wisdom and goodness could wish not to have existed.

Who can rationally desire a change in such a character as this? What would the change be? A change from perfection to imperfection; from knowledge to ignorance; from truth to falsehood; from justice to injustice; from kindness to cruelty; from universal excellence to universal turpitude. Perfection can be changed into nothing but imperfection. The immutability of God is indispensable to the glory of his character; and is itself a part of his perfection; for no mutable being can be perfect in the same sense with one who is immutable. Equally is it the corner-stone on which the universe rests. Were this support taken away, the immense fabric would tumble into ruin. To his creatures there would be neither safety nor hope; but immensity and eternity would be filled with suspense, terror, and anguish.

Particularly, there would not in this case be the least foundation for encouragement in prayer. If all the determinations of God were not settled in heaven; who could divine what new decisions would exist? what new laws? what new systems of administration? Prayer, commanded to-day, might be forbidden to-morrow. Prayer, acceptable to him to-day, might be hateful to him to-morrow. The things for which we now ask, with certain assurance of being heard, might speedily be denied. He who at one season did his duty, might at another, by the very same conduct, be only exposed to punishment. Nothing in this case could be known by creatures, to be permanently agreeable to his will, and finally secure of a reward. The government of the universe would be a government of fickleness and caprice; and consequently more or less, and no finite being can conjecture how far, a government of oppression and cruelty. Think what would be the exertions and effects of infinite knowledge and power, wielding the sceptre of the universe under the control of so dangerous a disposition. For aught that can be foreseen, the time might speedily, as well as easily, arrive, when, under such a dominion, this vast empire might, in a moment of change, be reduced to a desert of ravage and ruin.

As things are actually ordered by God, every part of the system is established on immoveable foundations. Every intelligent creature knows therefore, or may know, on what he is absolutely to depend. If he is obedient, his obedience will always be acceptable to his Maker. The law once established will never be changed. *Sooner shall heaven and earth pass away, than one jot or tittle of it shall pass, until all be fulfilled.* Every declaration of God is true: every promise will be exactly accomplished. Whatever sins or backslidings the children of God may have committed, his promise assures them of everlasting life. Whatever gross guilt or impious rebellion a Christian may have been the subject of, if they do not involve the sin against the Holy Ghost; still, if he exercises repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ, he will be received in the end.

Of this unchangeable system, one great and glorious part is, that every humble, faithful prayer shall be certainly

heard, accepted, and answered. Not one ever was or ever will be offered up in vain. This scheme of things contains every possible encouragement to pray, and displays the absolute necessity, as well as the superior usefulness and efficacy, of prayer. Any other scheme would exceedingly lessen, or entirely destroy, both the encouragement and the usefulness of prayer.

So far then are the predetermination and immutability of God from preventing and discouraging prayer, that they hold out infinitely more and greater inducements to this duty, than can be furnished in any other manner.

I have dwelt the longer and the more particularly upon this objection, because I consider it as the fundamental one, and because I believe it to be in some minds regarded as possessing real weight, and attended by real difficulties.

2. *It is also objected, that it is useless and impertinent to declare our wants to an omniscient being, because he knows them already.*

That God knows all our wants, that he knows them more perfectly than ourselves, and that he thus knew them from eternity, will, it is presumed, be universally admitted here. This knowledge must be attributed to God by every man who believes the Scriptures, or considers him as the author of all things. To give him therefore any information concerning ourselves, with a supposition that he needs thus to be informed, can never be the intention of a Christian suppliant, nor any part of a Christian prayer.

The true end of reciting our wants before God, is doubtless far distant from any thing that is even glanced at in the objection. Unquestionably it is the same end with that which we propose in confessing our sins; *viz.* the production of proper views in our minds. It is to awaken in ourselves a strong sense of our feebleness, our guilt, our dependance on God for all good, and our indebtedness to him for every blessing which we receive. By such views deeply impressed, we are more happily prepared for the reception of blessings, than we otherwise can be. We are rendered humble, submissive, affected with the greatness of our necessities, the importance of those supplies which we ask, and the glory of that goodness by which such wants of such beings are supplied. This state of mind is the happiest of

all dispositions for the reception of mercies, and is inwrought effectually in us only by prayer. Unless man therefore has an interest in not acquiring this disposition, the objection is groundless.

3. *It is farther objected, that as God is infinitely wise and good, whether we consider him as having predetermined all things or not, his wisdom and goodness will prompt him to give us whatever is proper to be given, and to withhold whatever is not, equally with and without our prayers.* Our prayers therefore must at the best be useless. "We cannot (says the objector) prevent, change, or influence, the dictates of infinite wisdom and goodness by our prayers. If we could, it would be wrong and undesirable; and ought plainly neither to be done nor wished."

All this is readily admitted; and were the design or the nature of prayer such as is here supposed, the impropriety of praying would, I presume, be also admitted. Certainly, it could never be a proper design in any creature, to attempt a change in the dictates of infinite wisdom and goodness.

But it may be very proper for infinite wisdom to bestow on an humble suppliant that which it would very properly withhold from him who refuses to pray. The question is not here, concerning what infinite wisdom will or will not give, but concerning the persons to whom it will give. Infinite wisdom may bestow all its favours on those who are willing to ask for them; and not on those who are unwilling: on those who feel their dependance upon itself; not on those who say in their conduct, *What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? and what profit shall we have, if we pray unto him?* on those who cheerfully and implicitly subject themselves to its dictates; not on those who speculate ingeniously concerning them.

Finally; Infinite wisdom may with propriety communicate its blessings to those who, by such means as are in their power, become prepared to receive them with a spirit of gratitude, reverence, and obedience; and may with equal propriety withhold them at the same time, from such as are too proud, too indolent, too indifferent, or too worldly-minded, to regard them with serious attention, or to receive them with a grateful or reverential spirit. Until all this can be disproved, the objection will stand for nothing. But this

can never be disproved. Reason declares it all as her own decision; and revelation places it beyond a cavil or a doubt. In the Scriptures we are taught expressly, that such is the real system of infinite wisdom and goodness; and that blessings actually descend only as answers to prayer.

4. *It is farther objected, that to suppose our prayers sufficiently efficacious to procure blessings for ourselves, and especially for others, indicates vanity and presumption.*

If we thought our prayers sufficiently meritorious in the sight of God to deserve such blessings as are bestowed either on ourselves or on others, there would be some ground for this objection. But when we pray as an act of obedience to his will, it is obviously unfounded. There can be neither presumption nor vanity in believing, that God is pleased with obedience, and that he will bless those who obey. God has commanded all men to pray to him. There is no presumption in believing this precept. He has declared, that faithful prayer is pleasing to him. There is no presumption in believing his declaration. He has promised to bless those who thus pray. Without presumption we may rely on his promise.

He has commanded us to pray for all men; and has promised to answer such prayers, when faithfully presented. In the Scriptures he has recorded numerous instances in which he has actually answered such prayers, by giving blessings to those for whom they were asked. To obey this command, to confide in this promise, and to receive this testimony, is neither vain nor presumptuous. The contrary conduct is chargeable with this criminality; for the objector supposes, that God will give him blessings in a way directly opposed to that in which alone he has encouraged men to expect them.

But farther, does not God make one man the instrument of blessings to another; to many, to thousands, to millions, and that in an immense variety of ways? How does it appear, that the heart, the desires, the supplications, of a good man may not be the means of such blessings, as truly, as properly, and as often, as his voice or his hands? All these blessings come from God. Will not he who *seeth not as man seeth, but looketh on the heart*, as willingly regard the virtuous efforts of which he is there a witness, as those of

the hands or the tongue? How few blessings do we enjoy, in which others have not been more or less instrumental! For our daily food and raiment, nay for our being, we are indebted to those who have lived in every age of time. In the same manner we are now reaping the benefits flowing from the prayers of good men in all past ages. The salvation of every Christian is a direct answer to the prayer of Christ. John xvii. 21, 22.

These are all the material objections usually made against prayer as a duty of man; I mean, all which are customarily exhibited as material by the objectors themselves. If the observations which have here been made in answer to them, have the same weight in the minds of others as in my own, it will be seen that they have no solid basis. Notwithstanding the speciousness which in the eyes of some individuals they have seemed to wear, the encouragements to this duty mentioned in these discourses stand altogether unassailed, and possessed of their whole strength. The objectors have conceived erroneously both of the nature and design of prayer; and misapprehended the proper influence of the several things from which they derive their supposed difficulties.

Let every one of my audience then go fearlessly and constantly to the duty of prayer; and be perfectly assured, that if he prays faithfully, he will not pray in vain. Let him remember, that prayer is a duty instituted by God; that he cannot but honour his own institution; and that he cannot but be pleased with those by whom it is obeyed. To pray is to obey God, to please him, to honour him. Those *who honour him he will honour, while those who despise him shall be lightly esteemed.* He has set before you every motive to induce you to perform this duty; commands, examples, particularly that of Christ; promises, instances of the actual and wonderful efficacy of prayer, and the clearest testimonies of his own approbation. At the same time, while he has taught you that no blessing is given but in answer to prayer, he has assured you also, that all good, temporal and eternal, descends as its proper answer from heaven. Nothing has he left untried to persuade you to this duty.

With his good pleasure all your own interests conspire

in urging you to pray. Prayer will make you daily better, wiser, and lovelier in his sight, by cherishing in you those views and emotions which constitute the character of a good man. It will soothe every tumult of your bosoms; allay your fears; comfort your sorrows; invigorate your hopes; give you peace in hand, and anticipate glory to come. It will restrain you from sin, strengthen you against temptation, recall you from wandering, give life and serenity to your consciences, furnish you with clearer views concerning your duty, alarm you concerning your danger, and inspire you with ardour, confidence, and delight, in the Christian course.

In prayer God will meet you, and commune with you face to face, as a man with his friend. He will *lift upon you the light of his* reconciled *countenance;* will *put joy and gladness in your hearts;* and will awaken in you the spirit of *thanksgiving* and *the voice of melody. When you pass through the waters, he will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you; when you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, neither shall the flame kindle on you: for he is the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour. In an acceptable time he will hear you, and in a day of salvation will he help you. The mountains will,* indeed, *depart, and the hills be removed; but* if you seek him faithfully, *his kindness shall not depart from you, nor his covenant of peace be removed. Seek,* then, *the Lord while he may be found; call ye upon him while he is near. When you call, he will answer; and when you cry unto him, he will say, Here I am.*

SERMON CXLIV.

THE ORDINARY MEANS OF GRACE.

FORMS OF PRAYER.

After this manner, therefore, pray ye. Our Father which art in heaven; hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.—MATT. VI. 9—13.

IN the preceding discourse I finished the observations which I thought it necessary to make concerning the *nature and seasons of prayer; the obligations to pray; the usefulness of prayer; the encouragements to it; and the objections against it.*

The next subject which claims our attention in a system of theology is, *forms of prayer.*

In the first verse of the text, our Saviour directs us *to pray after the manner begun in that verse, and continued through those which follow.* There are *two modes* in which this direction may be understood. *The first is, that this is a form of prayer prescribed to us; a form which therefore we are required to use, when we approach to God in this solemn service.* Hence it has been considered as a strong proof, that we are required to use a form of prayer, at least in the public worship of God, if not in that which is private. Even the candid and enlightened Paley says, "The Lord's prayer is a precedent as well as a pattern for forms of prayer. Our Lord appears, if not to have prescribed, at least to have authorized, the use of fixed forms, when he complied with the request of a disciple, who said unto him,

Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples." Luke xi. 1.

The other mode of construing this direction is this. *Christ is supposed to have taught here those subjects of prayer, which on all occasions are its proper subjects; the spirit with which we are to pray, and the simplicity of style and manner with which our thoughts are to be clothed, when we are employed in this duty.*

That our Saviour is not here to be considered as prescribing a form of prayer to his followers, seems not improbable from a comparison of the text with the context. In the context he directs us *not to do our alms before men, but in secret; when we pray, to enter into our closets; when we fast, not to be of a sad countenance, that we may not appear unto men to fast; and not to lay up for ourselves treasures upon earth.* None of these passages is, I apprehend, to be understood in the absolute or literal sense. We *may* give alms before others. It is our duty to give bread to a starving man in the sight of our families. Nay, it is often our duty to contribute publicly to public charities. We are warranted and required to pray and to fast before others; and commanded to *provide for our own, especially for those of our own households.* As none of these assertions will be disputed, they demand no proof. I shall only observe therefore, that the object of our Saviour in these precepts was, to forbid ostentation and covetousness; and to establish a sincere, humble, self-denying temper in our minds.

As these directions, which are unambiguously expressed, are evidently not to be construed in the literal sense; there is no small reason from analogy to believe, that the direction in the text, which is plainly ambiguous and indefinite, ought also not to be construed in this manner. There is, to say the least, as little reason to suppose, that our Saviour has here directed us to use this form of prayer, as that he has required us to do alms, pray, and fast, only in secret; and not to lay up property for the exigences of a future day.

This presumption is, I think, changed into a certainty by the following arguments.

1. *According to this scheme we are required always to use this form, and no other.*

The words, *After this manner pray ye,* if understood li-

terally, plainly require, that we *always* pray in this manner; and therefore in no other. If they require us to use this form; they require us always to use it. But this will not be admitted by those who hold the opinion against which I contend.

2. *When our Saviour gives directions to his disciples, at another time, to pray after this manner; he uses several variations from the form which is here given.*

In Luke xi. 2, &c. our Saviour recites in substance the form of prayer which is contained in the text; and adopts no less than *ten variations*. These he, who is *the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever*, adopted unquestionably with design. Of this design it was not improbably a part to teach us, that mere words are matters of such indifference, as at any time to be altered with propriety, in whatever manner the occasion may require.

One of the variations used by our Saviour in this place is the omission of the doxology. I am aware that this is also omitted by a considerable number of manuscripts in the text. But the authority for the admission of it is such, as to have determined in its favour almost all critics, and given it a place, so far as I know, in almost every Bible. It is therefore to be considered as a genuine part of this prayer of our Saviour. This shews, that the *substance* even of this prayer may without impropriety be varied in one part or another; as the particular occasion may demand or allow.

3. *The petitions here recited are not presented in the name of Christ.*

But our Saviour says, John xvi. 23, 24. 26, *Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name. Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full. At that day ye shall ask in my name*, St. Paul also, in Col. iii. 17, says, *Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God, even the Father, by him.* This prayer therefore is defective in one particular, which Christ and St. Paul have in these passages made essential to the acceptableness of our prayers.

4. *Christ himself does not appear to have used this prayer.*

We have several prayers of Christ recorded. All of these are such as plainly arose out of the occasion on which

they were offered up. They were in the strictest sense *extemporaneous:* the mere effusions of his heart concerning the subjects by which they were prompted. So far then as the example of Christ may be supposed to bear upon this question, it is unfavourable to the supposition that we are obliged to use this form; and favourable to the use of extemporaneous prayer.

5. *The apostles do not appear ever to have used this prayer.*

There are many prayers of the apostles recorded. All these were *extemporaneous,* like those of Christ, and the prophets who went before him; and sprang out of the occasion. If it be admitted that the apostles are here an example to *us;* it will follow, that our own prayers may, to say the least, be with the strictest propriety extemporaneous; and grow out of that state of facts by which we have been induced to pray. A full proof also is furnished here, that the apostles did not consider this form as obligatory on themselves.

6. *This prayer contains no expressions of thanksgiving.*

St. Paul, in Phil. iv. 6, says, *Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.* A similar injunction is recorded 1 Tim. ii. 1. From both these it is evident, that St. Paul considered thanksgiving as universally and essentially a part of prayer. Had he considered this form as obligatory on himself, or upon Christians in general; or had Christians in general so considered the subject at that time; he must, I think, have added a form of thanksgiving as a supplement to this prayer; and not left them to express their thanksgivings extemporaneously in their own words. There is no perceptible reason why Christians should utter thanksgivings extemporaneously in words of their own rather than adorations, petitions, or confessions for sin. If the Spirit of inspiration thought proper to prescribe a form to us in which we were required to present our petitions; it is reasonably believed that he would also prescribe to us a form in which the other parts also of this devotion were to be uttered.

7. *St. Paul refutes this supposition when he requires us to pray always with all prayer.* Eph. vi. 18.

From the prayers recorded in the Scriptures of the ancient saints of Christ and his apostles, we know that there is much prayer which, unless by very distant implication, cannot be said to be contained in this form. In the sentence which contains this precept of St. Paul, he directs the Ephesians to pray, that *utterance might be given unto him;* and that *he might open his mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel.* It will hardly be pretended, that this request is clearly contained in the Lord's prayer. The same thing is true of a vast multitude of other prayers found in the Scriptures. The truth plainly is, that the prayers contained in this sacred book almost universally sprang from particular occasions; are exactly such as suited those occasions, the natural effusions of the heart contemplating their nature, and feeling their importance. This fact effectually teaches us what it is to *pray always with all prayer:* viz. what I formerly explained it to be: *to pray on every proper occasion with prayer suited to that occasion.* But this cannot be accomplished unless we pray often, at least without a form, and in the extemporaneous manner.

These arguments, if I mistake not, prove, that the Lord's prayer was not prescribed to Christians as a form which they were intended or required to adopt. That it may be used, both lawfully and profitably, at various times, both in public and private; and that it may be very often thus used; I entertain not a single doubt.

The question concerning forms of prayer is now become a question of mere *expediency.* If the *Lord's prayer* is not enjoined upon us; it is certain that *no other form of prayer* can lay the least claim to such an injunction.

It is well known, that various sects of Christians are attached to forms of prayer in the public worship of God, and sometimes even in private worship. Such forms are prescribed by them as directories of public worship: and all those who belong to their communion are required to worship in this manner. Every objection to extemporaneous prayer is considered, and I think justly, by these Christians, as evidence of the advantages of a liturgy; and may, without any inconvenience, and without any discrimination, be blended with the positive arguments in favour of worshipping by a form. I shall therefore blend them in

the following examination. These arguments I consider as collected by Dr. Paley, so far as they have any force. I shall therefore follow this respectable writer in this discussion.

In behalf of forms of prayer, as directories of public worship, it is pleaded,

1. *That the use of them prevents the use of improper prayers; such particularly as are absurd, extravagant, or impious.*

"These," says Dr. Paley, "in an order of men so numerous as the sacerdotal, the folly and enthusiasm of many must always be in danger of producing, where the conduct of the public worship is intrusted, without restraint or assistance, to the discretion and abilities of the officiating minister."

To the argument here alleged I reply, that this complaint has been originated by those who have used liturgies; and not by those who have worshipped with extemporaneous prayer. Yet these persons are incomparably more interested to complain; because, if the evil exists, they, and they only, suffer by it. At the same time, they are also the only proper judges, as being the only persons who have sufficient experience of this evil, or the want of a liturgy, to enable them to judge. The allegation was invented therefore to justify the use of a liturgy already adopted; and not admitted as a proof of the necessity of worshipping by a liturgy; and as a truth forced upon the conviction of men by the existence of thee vil which in this case it would be intended to remedy.

Facts are often discordant with theories; and often refute them. Such I apprehend is the truth in the present case. In the vast multitude of Christian congregations who, in Switzerland, Protestant France, Germany, Ireland, and America; in Holland, England, and Scotland; worship without a form, no material difficulty of this nature has ever been perceived. Within the many millions of mankind, who for centuries have worshipped in this manner, there has certainly been a sufficient number of enlightened men, a sufficient length of time, and a sufficient variety of character and circumstances, to have presented and to have felt this evil, if it has actually existed, in every manner and degree in which it is capable of existing. Yet no complaint

has ever prevailed to any extent in any Protestant age or country among those who have worshipped without forms of prayer. It will not be pretended, that among these persons, religion, *in the proper sense*, has not had as extensive and happy influence, as it has had during the same period among any of the human race.

That there have been solitary instances of this nature I readily admit. But that they have been sufficiently numerous to furnish ground for this allegation, cannot be seriously maintained for a moment, by any man who considers this fact with candour, or even with sober attention.

I speak not here of the performances of *ignorant men*, who thrust themselves into the desk without right, propriety, or even decency; nor of those who, without any appearance of piety, are admitted into the church, merely because they are (in the language of Dr. Paley) "descendants of large families," and for the purpose of furnishing them with easy means of subsistence: men who, as this writer says, are "no farther ministers of religion, than as a cockade makes a soldier." From the former of these classes, extravagant addresses to God; from the latter, such as are impious; and from both, such as are absurd; may indeed be expected. But the existence of such persons in the desk, although an indelible reproach to those who are bound to *lay hands suddenly on no man*, and to all who voluntarily attend the ministry of these persons, infers no objection against extemporaneous prayer. Among the men who are educated and morally qualified for the ministry, too few will always be found guilty of this conduct to furnish any serious argument in favour of a liturgy. While among so many and so discreet Christians, who through many ages and in many countries have worshipped in this manner, no difficulty of this kind has ever been seriously felt; the objection is plainly imaginary.

Prayer is, of all kinds of discourse, that which least demands elegance of style. Every professed ornament it rejects with disdain. The simplest, plainest, and least artificial manner of uttering his thoughts, alone becomes the character of a suppliant, or the occasion and design of his supplication. He who feels inclined to pray, will loathe all critical phraseology in his prayers. Decency, every

where demanded, is indispensable in the worship of God: but beyond this nothing is necessary in our prayers, beside humility, faithfulness, and fervour. But decency is easily attainable by men of moderate talents, without the aid of a superior education. Plain men, as is not unfrequently seen both in private and public religious assemblies, pray with much propriety, and with no small edification to their fellow-Christians. He who has universally made prayer a prime duty of man, has qualified man for the performance of this duty; and, as I apprehend, much more happily than this objection supposes.

2. *It is objected also, that extemporaneous prayer must be attended with confusion in the mind of the hearer.*

The ignorance of each petition before it is heard; the want of time to join in it after it is heard; the necessary suspension of devotion until it is concluded; the necessity of attending to what succeeds; the detention of the mind from its proper business by the very novelty with which it is gratified; form together the sources of this confusion; and furnish, in the view of Dr. Paley, a fundamental objection against extemporary prayer, even where the minister's office is discharged with every possible advantage and accomplishment. Concerning this objection I observe,

First, *That it attaches a gross and fundamental impropriety to the prayers of inspired men, mentioned in the Scriptures.*

The prayer of Solomon, at the dedication of the temple, was, I think, unquestionably intended to awaken the spirit of devotion in the great assembly before which it was uttered; and to become the vehicle of their own supplications. But this design was impracticable on *that occasion*, and with respect to *that assembly*, as truly, and as extensively, as with respect to *any modern congregation of Christians*. There are many instances also in which the apostles and their fellow-Christians assembled for prayer. The prayers actually uttered on these occasions were, I think, with a degree of probability next to certainty, extemporary. The persons who heard them could not better tell the import of each petition before they heard it, than modern Christian assemblies. Their devotion was as much suspended until a petition was concluded. They were as

much held in continual expectation; were detained as much from their proper business of joining in prayer; and were, *in all other respects*, subjected to as many disadvantages. The unavoidable conclusion from these premises is, that the apostles prayed in a manner unfitted for the purposes of devotion, unedifying to those with whom they prayed, and of course unapproved by the Spirit of God.

This conclusion no objector will admit. But if an objector refuse to admit the conclusion; he must, I think, give up the premises. If men could profitably unite in extemporary prayer in the days of Solomon, or in the days of the apostles, they can do it now.

Secondly. *The same objection lies with equal force, to a great extent, against the union which the objectors themselves suppose to exist, and will acknowledge to be absolutely necessary, in other parts of religious worship.*

A considerable number of persons, from perhaps one half to seven-eighths of the whole number usually gathered in religious assemblies, are, throughout almost all Christian countries, *unable to read.* Of these it may be properly observed here, that from the confused manner in which the responses in a liturgy will ever be read by a numerous and mixed assembly, they must very imperfectly hear and understand this part of the prayers. That which they gain by hearing however is all which they gain. All these, unless they learn the prayers by heart, a fact which it is presumed rarely happens, must be in a much less favourable situation in some respects, and better situated in none, than when they are present at extemporary prayers.

Equally unable are these persons to *read psalms.* If men cannot join in the prayers uttered by a minister, it will be difficult to shew how they can unite in the praises sung by a choir.

My audience well know, that *hearing the word of God* is in my own view *a part*, and a very solemn and important part, *of public worship.* To receive divine truth and divine precepts, as being really divine, with reverence, faith, and love, is an ordinance as truly appointed by God, and as acceptable means of honouring him, as prayer or praise. To hear with any advantage, it is necessary that we should both *understand* and *feel* what we hear. In order to *under-*

stand, it is indispensable, that *we examine every thing* uttered by the preacher, which is not absolutely obvious, with *a momentary investigation employed upon each of his assertions.* In order *to feel,* it is equally necessary, that a little longer time should be spent upon every part of a discourse which is fitted to awaken feeling. The time necessary for both these acts of the mind, must at least be equal to that which is demanded for such union in prayer as will make the several petitions our own. But all the confusion, suspense, detention, and embarrassment, from novelty, will here have as much influence to prevent us from hearing a sermon in a proper manner, as from joining in extemporary prayer. Here also the labouring recollection, and embarrassed or tumultuous delivery, of which Dr. Paley complains, will have their full effect. Most men, unless when destitute of self-possession, speak extemporaneously with more distinctness and propriety, than they read; and are, therefore more readily and perfectly understood. But if an audience do not understand and feel a sermon, they fail as effectually of performing this part of religious worship, as of performing the duty of prayer when they do not join in the petitions. The same difficulties therefore attend thus far the performance of both these religious services, which are here supposed to attend extemporary prayer. It is presumed however that they are imaginary in both cases: for,

Thirdly. *The answer to the former objection is applicable with the same force to this:* viz. *That the difficulties complained of have never existed in such a manner, as to be of serious importance in the view of those who have worshipped publicly with extemporary prayer.*

In the long periods throughout which, and among the numerous millions by whom, this mode of worship has been adopted, no complaint of any magnitude has ever arisen concerning this subject. It will not be asserted, and with decency cannot, that these persons have been less serious, less scrupulous about their worship, or less anxious to perform the duties of religion aright, than an equal number of their fellow-Christians. Experience therefore is wholly against both of these objections; and experience is the only evidence or umpire in the case.

The advocates for forms of prayer admit, that they are

attended by some disadvantages. Among these, Dr. Paley considers the two following as the principal.

1. *That forms of prayer composed in one age become unfit for another, by the unavoidable change of language, circumstances, and opinions.*

This objection must doubtless be allowed to have some degree of force. I do not however think it necessarily of very serious importance. To make frequent alterations in so solemn a service would certainly be dangerous. Nor ought they ever to be made without extreme caution. Yet when they are plainly demanded by existing circumstances, it can hardly be supposed, that a collection of Christians would refuse their consent to safe and reasonable changes: especially after the evil had become considerable.

2. *That the perpetual repetition of the same form of words produces weariness and inattentiveness in the congregation.*

This I esteem a more serious difficulty than the former: so far as such a repetition exists: while I readily acknowledge, that its existence appears to me unnecessary. For this evil, Dr. Paley observes, "Devotion may supply a remedy." I admit that it may; and doubt not that in individual minds it does; at least in a considerable measure. Still the objection is far from being removed. Every mode of worship ought to be so formed, as to *awaken devotion*, always too languid; and not so as to *diminish a flame*, which is scarcely perceptible. It is the nature of all repetition, as well as of continual sameness, soon to weary minds, formed, like ours, with an inherent love of change and novelty. This, in every other case, is perceived and acknowledged. No reason appears why it should not be acknowledged in this. Devotion easily languishes in the most pious minds; and ought therefore to be assisted, not repressed. The best men complain often, and justly, of lukewarm affections, and wandering thoughts. What then shall be said of others? Certainly the fervour of devotion referred to must be unsafely relied on to remedy the evils of a wearisome service in the minds of a congregation at large.

To obviate the force of these remarks, it may be said, that psalms and hymns are sung in frequent repetition. I reply, that these are rarely repeated, when compared with

repetitions in forms of prayer. Yet even these, when sung several times within a short period, become obviously tiresome.

But besides that the Psalms are given us in Scripture, and are therefore regarded with a reverence, which can be claimed by no human composition, both psalms and hymns are always *sung;* and are therefore recommended to the hearer by the powerful aid of music. This is an advantage which nothing else can boast; and counterbalances whatever tediousness would otherwise be found in any necessary or proper repetition. These therefore may be fairly laid aside, as being without the debate.

3. *To these objections ought to be added another; That the mode of uttering the forms of prayer in actual use is unhappy.*

This mode, as is well known, is, *the audible union of a whole congregation in reading each prayer throughout a considerable part of the service.* The effect of this practice, so far as I can judge from my own experience, is, in a greater or less degree, to disturb the attention and confound the thoughts of the several suppliants. How far the power of habit may go towards lessening or removing these evils, it is impossible for me, without more experience of the effects of this mode of worship, to judge. But independently of this consideration, so many voices, set by nature to so many different keys, and directed in so many different methods of modulation, are certainly an embarrassment of that quietness and steadiness of thought, that entire self-possession, so desirable during the time of religious worship. Sounds, which are very numerous, are, when uttered at the same moment, almost of course perplexing. Discordant sounds are necessarily unpleasant; and no circumstances can prevent this effect on the mind.

4. *Forms of prayer must necessarily be general: whereas the nature of prayer demands, that our petitions should in a great measure be particular.*

It is no part of the design of prayer to change the purposes or conduct of the CREATOR. Its whole import consists, in exciting our obedience to him, and the amendment of ourselves. By awakening in our minds a sense of our guilt, danger, necessities, helplessness, dependance, and

indebtedness; of our own littleness, and the greatness, wisdom, and goodness, of our MAKER; we are improved in our moral character, and fitted to receive the blessings which we need. The more these emotions are excited, the more effectually are these ends accomplished. Of course, the most advantageous means should always be used for this purpose.

Hence it will be easily seen, that prayer ought, as far as may be, to consist of petitions, confessions, thanksgiving, and adoration, formed in particular, not in general, thoughts and expressions. General declarations and images of all kinds, except when eminently important, are feeble and unimpressive. Particular ones, on the contrary, are deeply and alone impressive.

Whenever the end of what we speak or write is to interest either the imagination or the heart; it is a rule of every rhetorical writer, and ordinarily the practice of every man who follows nature, to use particular images and expressions. No reason appears why this rule, founded in the native character of man, may not be applied to the present case with the same propriety as to any other.

The principal end of prayer is, *not to teach, but to move, the heart.* The more this rule is followed, the more will the end be attained. In all the warrantable means of quickening the affections, prayer ought plainly to abound. Both the sentiments and language ought to be simple, artless, apparently the result of no labour, derived from the occasion, and springing directly from the heart. To this scheme, the confessions, petitions, and thanksgivings, should, I think, be generally conformed, wherever it is intended to be made deeply impressive.

This is a purpose which no form of prayer, however admirably composed, can successfully accomplish. Designed for so many persons, occasions, and ages, it must of necessity be, to a great extent, general; and, so far, defective. The mind, deeply interested by the occasion, must be disappointed of what it naturally expects; and displeased, when it finds the strain of sentiment falling short of its own feelings. In this degree therefore it will fail of being edified. The emotions which it wishes to have excited, and which the occasion demands and awakens, are either faintly,

excited or suffered to sleep. If persons accustomed to the use of a liturgy find, as they think, those difficulties in extemporary prayer, which are alleged by Dr. Parley; such as are accustomed to prayer of this nature complain, with not less feeling, and as they apprehend with not less reason, of the general unimpressive character of forms; and their want of a perceptible adaptation to the particular circumstances of the suppliants.

Almost every prayer recorded in the Scriptures sprang out of the case which prompted it; and expresses its particular, important, and most affecting circumstances. Such are Abraham's for Ishmael, Gen. xvii; Abraham's for Sodom, Gen. xviii; Lot's for himself, Gen. xix; Isaac's for Jacob and Esau, Gen. xxvii; Jacob's for himself, Gen. xxviii; those of Moses for Israel, Exod. xxxii, and xxxiii; Gideon's, Judges vi; Samson's, Judges xvi; Hannah's, 1 Sam. ii; David's, 2 Sam. vii; Solomon's, 1 Kings viii; Jehoshaphat's for Judah, 2 Chron. xx; Hezekiah's for Israel, 2 Kings xix; Hezekiah's for himself, 2 Kings xx; Ezra's for Judah, Ezra ix; the prayer of the Levites for Judah, Neh. ix; those of Jeremiah and Daniel; that of Josiah; those recorded of Christ; and those recorded of the apostles.

In all these and several other instances; particularly, many contained in the Psalms; the prayer is chiefly directed to the occasion in hand, whether a public or private one; for it is to be remembered, that several of them were prayers of the most public nature; and although uttered chiefly by individuals, were uttered in the midst of great assemblies and offered up in their name. Nor is there, so far as I remember, a single prayer recorded in the Scriptures (the text being here laid out of the question), which has at all the aspect of having been a form or a part of a standing liturgy.

From these observations it will be seen, that prayer is no other than the thoughts of a devotional mind, ascending silently to God, or audibly expressed. What these thoughts are *in the mind*, the prayer *of the voice* ought ever to be. Hence, as the thoughts will vary, so the prayer will also vary, according to the numberless cases of suppliants; the cares, wants, fears, distresses, supplics, hopes, and joys. In this

manner the prophets, apostles, and our Saviour himself prayed. Thus the Spirit of God directed those, who alone were under his express direction. Whatever *infirmities* we who are uninspired may labour under, the same Spirit may with humble confidence be expected to *help*, so far as shall be necessary for us, as he helped theirs. Their example he has recorded both for our instruction and encouragement. As their circumstances gave birth both to their thoughts and expressions; no reason appears, why our prayers should not arise also out of our circumstances. The difficulties supposed to attend this manner of worshipping God will, it is believed, vanish if our hearts are engaged in our services.

Such are the views which have occurred to me concerning this subject. Still, I have no controversy with those who think forms of prayer most edifying to themselves. They undoubtedly must be their own judges. Particularly, as their experience concerning this side of the question has been far greater than mine; I cannot controvert the decisions of this experience, so far as they are to respect themselves only. Very many unquestionable and excellent Christians have worshipped in both these methods. In both these methods therefore, men may be excellent Christians, and worship God in an acceptable manner. On this subject, whether considered as a subject of speculation or of practice, no debate ought ever to arise, except that which is entirely catholic and friendly; and no feelings beside those which are of the most charitable nature. Zeal, however commendable it may be in some cases, seems here out of place.

I have now finished the observations which I thought proper to make concerning forms of prayer, and concerning the Lord's prayer, considered as either requiring or warranting us to pray by a form. It may however be proper to add, as a mere opinion of my own, that it is perfectly proper, and will be wise, for all such persons as are in danger of losing their self-possession, or of being otherwise embarrassed, when they are to perform this duty, whether in public or in private, to obtain well-written forms of prayer; and make them their directories in the performance of this duty. This practice I should recommend also, so

long as the danger of embarrassment should continue; even if it should continue through life. To pray by a form may not be the best method of directing this duty at large; and may yet be the best method which, in given circumstances, will be in our power. It certainly will be far more desirable to use a form of prayer, than to pray in an embarrassed and interrupted manner.

In the beginning of this discourse I have suggested, that the Lord's prayer was intended to teach us the subjects, the spirit, and the manner, of our prayers. Concerning the subjects we are taught particularly, that we ought to pray continually and extensively for the prosperity of the kingdom and worship of God, and the conversion and obedience of mankind; to ask daily for our daily bread; for the forgiveness of our sins; for a spirit of forgiveness towards others; for security against temptation; and for protection and deliverance from evil both natural and moral. We are also here directed to look to God, as our father and friend, for parental love, tenderness, and blessings; and to rejoice that *the kingdom, the power, and the glory,* are his, and will be his, only and for ever.

These things are all plainly taught in this very remarkable form of prayer. They are however far from being all that are taught. No composition, it is presumed, ever contained more, or more valuable, instruction. Among the truths which are obviously involved in it, are the following.

1. That we are not to expect a gracious audience of God *for our much speaking,* but for the *sincerity, humilty,* and *piety,* with which we pray.

2. That *all places,* where we can pray with decency, and without ostentation and interruption, are proper places for the performance of this duty.

All men are to use this prayer, at least in substance: but all men cannot resort for this purpose to the temple of Jerusalem, to a church, nor to any other places supposed to be consecrated.

3. That prayer is a *social employment.*

Our Father is the language of numbers; of a family, or of a congregation; not of an individual. Similar phraseology runs also through the whole form.

4. That we are to pray for *others.*

Three of these petitions are employed as prayer for others; *viz.* the three first.

5. That we are equally dependant on God for *spiritual good,* as for *temporal;* and for safety from moral, as well as from natural, evil.

6. That *our desires* for natural good must always be *moderate* and *humble.*

We are here taught to pray *daily,* not for *wealth,* but for *daily bread.*

7. That we cannot pray acceptably, unless we exercise *a spirit of forgiveness towards our enemies.*

8. That we are to pray equally for those things *which God has foretold,* as for those which to us are unknown and uncertain.

God has foretold, that *his name shall be hallowed, his kingdom come, and his will be done,* in the manner here specified: yet for these things we are directed to pray.

9. That *the predetermination of God,* therefore, ought never to be a *hinderance* nor *discouragement* to prayer.

That God has predetermined that *his kingdom shall be built up, his name hallowed, and his will done, throughout the earth,* will not be questioned by any man who reads and believes the Bible. Yet for these things we are here required to pray.

Finally. We are taught by this prayer, that he who does not sincerely desire that *the name of God may be hallowed,* that *his kingdom may come, and his will be done;* who cannot heartily rejoice that *the kingdom, the power, and the glory, are his,* and will be his throughout eternity; and who cannot subjoin to all these things his own solemn *Amen;* does not and cannot pray in the manner required by the Redeemer of mankind.

SERMON CXLV.

THE ORDINARY MEANS OF GRACE.

INTERCOURSE WITH RELIGIOUS MEN.

He that walketh with wise men shall be wise.
PROV. XIII. 20.

HAVING finished the proposed examination of the great Christian duty of *prayer*, I shall now proceed to the next subject in the order formerly mentioned: *viz.*

Intercourse with religious men.

The text informs us, that *he who walketh with wise men shall be wise.* Wisdom, it is well known, is extensively employed by the divine writers, particularly by Solomon, to denote *religion. Wise men* therefore are, in the language of the Scriptures, *religious men.*

To walk, denotes in the same language, *to converse familiarly and frequently, or to have our whole course of life intimately and familiarly connected, with the persons or objects with whom, or amid which, we are supposed to walk.*

The following doctrine is therefore obviously contained in the text, *That he who lives and converses frequently and intimately with religious men, may ordinarily be expected to become religious.* The declaration in the text is absolute: but I understand such declarations, as usually meaning no more than I have here expressed. Thus, *Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it,* another expression of the same nature, intends not, that every child thus educated will certainly become religious, but that this will ordinarily be the fact, and may therefore always be fairly expected.

There are two senses in which the text, without any violence, may be understood: the obvious one,

That persons hitherto destitute of religion will assume this character; and the more remote one,

That persons already religious will, by this intercourse, become more so. He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: that is, *emphatically* or *eminently.*

I shall take the liberty to consider the subject with respect to both these senses.

I. *Those who are destitute of religion, and converse frequently and religiously with religious men, may ordinarily be expected to become religious.*

In proof of this position, I observe,

1. *Religion, in the conduct of a man really and eminently possessed of this character, appears to others to be real.*

The Bible exhibits religion with abundant proof, and with supreme force and beauty. It presents this great subject to us in the form of doctrines, precepts, and, so far as history can furnish them, of examples also. It presents us, at the same time, with the most satisfactory arguments to prove, that these exhibitions are made by the hand of God himself. Still, although the mind is unable to deny the sufficiency, force, and beauty, of the representation, or to refute the arguments by which it is supported, it can withdraw itself from both; and in this manner can avoid the conviction which it is intended to produce, and the emotions which it is fitted to inspire. The subject is naturally uncongenial to the taste of man: and from every such subject, man almost instinctively wishes to withdraw his attention, and turn his eye away. To do this is almost always in his power; and however dangerous may be the conduct, and however desirable the contrary conduct, will, almost of course, be the dictate of inclination. The subject which he disrelishes, he can shun. To the arguments which sustain it, he can refuse to listen. Against the evidence which they convey, he can close his eyes. In this manner it will be easy for him to say, in the case under consideration, "The religion presented to us in the gospel, forms indeed an excellent character; and would be not a little desirable, were it real and attainable by such a being as man. But, out of the Scriptures, where shall it be found? There are, it is true, those who profess to be religious; and

who, it must be acknowledged, are somewhat more grave, specious, and imposing in their deportment, than most other men. But I see nothing in their character which may not be rivalled by other men; nothing, which may not be explained by the common principles of our nature; nothing, which proves them to possess the extraordinary spirit exhibited in the gospel. I think therefore it may be reasonably concluded, that the religion taught in the Scriptures, although beautiful and desirable to the eye of the mind, exists in the Scriptures only; and has no real or practical being in the hearts of men. As a speculative object, it is commendable; as a practical one, it is, I think, chiefly imaginary." Such may be, such I doubt not often have been, the sentiments of persons living under the gospel concerning religion: persons who have read the accounts concerning it given in the Scriptures, and at the same time have surveyed the conduct of its professors only at a distance, and seen it only in the gross. Nor can it be denied that these sentiments, although false and groundless, are yet natural, frequent, and in a sense common.

But in real life the subject plainly wears a different aspect. There are many persons and many cases, by whom and in which the spirit of the gospel is manifested so unambiguously as to allow of no doubt concerning its reality, nature, and efficacy, in the mind of an honest beholder. The evidence is of such a nature, that it cannot be evaded, unless by a prejudice too gross, a violation of conscience too palpable, to be admitted by a man who can lay any claim to fairness of character. It would be oftener seen, and oftener acknowledged, were the person, on whom the sight and acknowledgment might have the happy influence under consideration, to converse more frequently and more intimately with men of piety. If we were really to walk with wise men; if we were to live by their side; mark their conduct; compare it with that of others; and inquire concerning the principles from which it was derived; it would be difficult for us to mistake the nature of this subject. We should see the conduct itself to be exceedingly different, nay, in many respects directly opposite, in the two cases. Effects of this diverse and opposite nature we should be compelled to attribute to diverse and opposite causes. One

class of them we should, in a word, be obliged to ascribe to religion, and the other to the native character of man. Even in our secret thoughts we should be forced to make this acknowledgment. The understanding could not withdraw itself from conviction; and conscience would not fail to hold up the subject in full view.

2. *In the conduct of such men religion also appears solemn, dignified, and superior.*

All wicked men, unless when under the influence of violent passion, necessarily feel the superiority of those who are truly and unaffectedly virtuous. A sense of this superiority, and of their own comparative depression, is the source, in an extensive degree, of that hostility which they so often manifest towards persons of this character. From these emotions no such man can escape. In the neighbourhood of virtue they are always in the shade; and are not unfrequently shrunk and withered. Milton, after having recited the rebuke of Zephon to Satan, says very justly, as well as very beautifully,

> "Abash'd the devil stood,
> And felt how awful goodness is, and saw
> Virtue in her shape how lovely."

Such, in multiplied instances, has been the effect of rebukes adminstered by virtuous men to those who are wicked.

The awe, the reverence, the consciousness of superiority, inspired in the minds of sinners by virtue, appearing with its own solemn and venerable dignity, are not always accompanied nor followed by hatred. If I mistake not, they in many instances terminate in a settled respect and admiration for the virtuous persons by whose conduct they were excited: emotions not unfrequently productive of the happiest effects on the hearts and lives of those by whom they are entertained. It is unnecessary to prove, that men naturally seek the company of those whom they respect and admire. As little is it necessary to shew, that the sentiments, and opinions of such persons, have of course no small influence over the minds of such as thus seek their company. Between reverencing and embracing the sentiments of persons thus situated, the steps are few, and the

transition is easy. There is the utmost reason to believe, that this happy progress has often taken place.

3. *In the conduct of such men, also, religion appears lovely.*

The consciences of sinful men, perhaps of all such men, when their consciences are permitted to testify at all, testify to the loveliness of evangelical virtue. In their language, I confess, it is often denied; and still more frequently, perhaps, is given in a grudging niggardly manner. By their consciences it is acknowledged of course.

Wherever the judgment of the mind is allowed to decide without a bias, it of course pronounces the law of God to require nothing but what is reasonable, excellent, and useful. Of this nature, beyond a question, is piety to its author, benevolence to his creatures. In no form can these exercises of mind be manifested, without being seen to be amiable by every unprejudiced eye. Justice, kindness, truth, disinterestedness, forgiveness to enemies, and mercy to the suffering, are always desirable, always lovely. With the same amiableness is the government of our passions and appetites regularly adorned. Meekness, gentleness, sobriety, and temperance, are indispensable to an amiable character; and all persons who wish to be loved by others, are forced invariably either to assume, or at least to exhibit, these characteristics to their fellow-men.

The *union* of these attributes is the consummation of moral excellence to man; and involves whatever is really and eminently lovely. Wherever they are thus united, and are at the same time exhibited in their native light, without the obscuring influence of characteristical passions, prejudices, uncouthness, or vulgarity, the understanding is compelled to acknowledge their excellence, and secretly at least to pronounce them lovely. Even gross and hard-hearted men, much more persons possessing dispositions naturally sweet and susceptible, are often greatly affected by the sincere and artless display of these attributes. In many instances, there is good reason to believe, they produce in the minds of unrenewed men a conviction of the reality of religion, which argument has never been able to produce; and a sense of its worth, followed by the happiest consequences.

A man of my acquaintance, who was of a vehement and rigid temper, had many years since a dispute with a friend of his; a professor of religion; and had been injured by him. With strong feelings of resentment he made him a visit, for the avowed purpose of quarrelling with him. He accordingly stated to him the nature and extent of the injury; and was preparing, as he afterward confessed, to load him with a train of severe reproaches: when his friend cut him short by acknowledging, with the utmost readiness and frankness, the injustice of which he had been guilty; expressing his own regret for the wrong which he had done; requesting his forgiveness; and proffering him ample compensation. He was compelled to say that he was satisfied; and withdrew, full of mortification, that he had been precluded from venting his indignation, and wounding his friend with keen and violent reproaches for his conduct. As he was walking homeward, he said to himself to this effect. "There must be something more in religion than I have hitherto suspected. Were any man to address me in the tone of haughtiness and provocation with which I accosted my friend this evening; it would be impossible for me to preserve the equanimity of which I have been a witness; and especially with so much frankness, humility, and meekness, to acknowledge the wrong which I had done; so readily ask forgiveness of the man whom I had injured; and so cheerfully promise a satisfactory recompense. I should have met his anger with at least equal resentment; paid him reproach for reproach; and inflicted wound for wound. There is something in *this man's* disposition, which is not in *mine*. There is something in the religion which he professes, and which I am forced to believe he feels; something which makes him superior, so much better, so much more amiable, than I can pretend to be. The subject strikes me in a manner to which I have hitherto been a stranger. It is high time to examine it more thoroughly, with more candour, and with greater solicitude also, than I have done hitherto."

From this incident a train of thoughts and emotions commenced in the mind of this man, which terminated in his profession of the Christian religion; his relinquishment of the

business in which he was engaged; and his consecration of himself to the ministry of the gospel.

4. *The conversation of religious persons has often great power upon the consciences of sinners.*

None can set the great truths of the gospel in so strong or solemn a point of view, as those who feel them. None can speak of sin so justly, so clearly, or so pungently, as those who, under alarming convictions, have realized their guilt and their danger, and been roused by a strong sense of their ruin to the most anxious and laborious efforts for their recovery; and who, with an ingenuous contrition of heart, have learned to realize its hateful nature, as well as its dreadful consequences. None can speak of holiness like those who understand its nature, the delightful tenor of its affection, the peace which accompanies it, and the joy which it inspires, by their own undeceiving, impressive, and happy experience.

Who can present in such strong, affecting, awful colours the world of perdition, as will naturally be employed by those who have beheld its transcendent evils with realized conviction and deep amazement; who have seen it *naked before them;* felt their own near approach to its sufferings: and still tremble under a sense of their marvellous escape?

Who can bring heaven before the eyes, and delineate with a glowing pencil, in living colours, its immortal glory, like those who have thought long and often of that happy world, with the *faith* which *is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen,* and *the hope* which *entereth into that within the veil?* Who can discourse concerning the celestial Paradise like those who, with a divine relish already formed in their minds, are prepared to enjoy the blessings of eternal life; who, conscious that they *are pilgrims and strangers here,* regard themselves as citizens of the New Jerusalem, and look forward with delightful anticipation to that period, when they shall there be united to all who love them, and to all whom they love.

Who can reprove with such pungency, with such efficacy, with such success, as those who are believed to be in earnest, loathe and shun the sin which they reprove, and to delight in the holiness which they inculcate? Who can re-

prove in so acceptable or so persuasive a manner, as those who perform this delicate and difficult duty, with the meekness and gentleness, the humility and forbearance, of the gospel; and whose lives, *adorning the doctrine of God our Saviour*, add to every remonstrance the peculiar weight of an unblemished example?

What is true of these subjects, is equally applicable to all others which are made the themes of religious conversation. *The words of the wise*, that is, of religious men, says Solomon, *are as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies. The words of the wise*, says Peter, in his translation of this passage, *are as goads, or as if planted with briers.*

When the disciples went to Emmaus, they expressed the influence of Christ's conversation in these remarkable terms; *Did not our hearts burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the Scriptures?* The conversation of pious men is not indeed that of Christ; but it possesses in some degree the same influence; and wherever it is conformed to the gospel, and conducted with the prudence which the gospel requires, cannot fail to leave behind it desirable effects.

In revivals of religion, when conversation concerning this subject prevails, and the tidings of conversion are multiplied; when the power of sympathy is awake, and the soul is prepared readily to interest itself in the spiritual affairs of its fellow-men; every thing pertaining to their religious circumstances appears to have a peculiar influence upon the minds of others. Their views and affections, their conversation and their conduct, nay, the bare narratives of whatever pertains to their religious interests, appear through the power of sympathy to produce great, extensive, and happy effects on those to whom they are made known. It is a remark of president Edwards, derived from his own observation during an extraordinary revival of religion, that "nothing seemed to produce greater effects on the minds of his own congregation, than recitals of the prevalence of religion in other places."

The more frequent and the more intimate our intercourse with such persons is, the greater and happier is its efficacy. The same thing is true when the persons with whom we con-

verse and live are possessed of characters peculiarly venerable, or of manners and dispositions peculiarly lovely. Amiable companions, near and affectionate relatives, parents, ministers, and rulers, when persons of unaffected piety, contribute more by their conversation and example, than can be easily imagined, to spread religion among mankind, and to preserve the world from profligacy and ruin. The *light* of these persons *so shines before others, that they, beholding their good works,* actually *glorify their Father who is in heaven.**

II. *Persons already religious will by this intercourse become more so.*

All the observations made under the preceding head are applicable to this also; and with additional force. But there are other considerations peculiar to this; and those of distinguished importance.

1. *Persons already religious, are prepared to realize whatever is communicated to them by others of the same character.*

As face answereth to face in the water, so doth the heart of man to man. This observation may be emphatically applied to the hearts of Christians. Their views are substantially the same: their taste is the same: their character is the same. They have all a common interest: are engaged in common pursuits; and are bound towards a common home. They are all of one family: are children of one parent; and followers of one Redeemer. All of them discern *spiritual things in a spiritual manner;* and relish them with a spiritual taste. To the interests of the divine kingdom, and to the concerns of the least individual who belongs to it, not one of them is indifferent. All are prepared to feel the concerns of all: and by every one, so far as they are communicated, they are actually felt. Every thing, therefore, in the life and conversation of one Christian, will easily be transferred to his own circumstances by every other.

It is easy to perceive, that mutual communications among persons of such a character, and in such circumstances,

* Matthew v. 16.

will of course be regarded as the communications of friends and brethren. Every man knows with what a welcome he hears, how readily he believes, how deeply he feels, and how much he is influenced by the conversation and sentiments of a beloved friend. The importance of this consideration is peculiarly seen in every case of reproof. The difficulties which usually attend the administration of reproof, and its frequent want of efficacy and success, are subjects of complaint in the mouth of every thinking man. All these difficulties plainly lie in the character either of the reprover or the reproved. It is indispensable that the reprover, if any hope be entertained of succes, be regarded as a friend; and that he assume the lowliness, meekness, long-suffering, and forbearance, of the gospel. Such is the character of the Christian in the eye of his fellow-Christian; and such is the disposition with which his reproofs will be administered. They will therefore have all the advantage furnished by the fact, that they are derived from the best source.

At the same time, religion prepares the person who is to be reproved, in the best manner to receive this office of friendship. It teaches him his own frailty; the guilt and danger of backsliding; the absolute necessity of reproof to himself as well as to others; the obligations which his fellow-Christians are under to administer it; the benevolent ends which it is designed to answer; and the peculiar friendship employed in reproving, agreeably to the injunctions of the gospel. Thus the Christian is by his disposition prepared to discern, that *the reproofs of instruction are the way of life;* and thus *a reproof entereth more into a wise man, than a hundred stripes into a fool.*

Nor is the Christian less fitted to derive instruction, improvement, and enjoyment, from other religious communications. By a kind of instinctive application he makes the cases, views, and feelings, of his fellow-Christians his own. From their dangers he learns the means of safety to himself. From their backslidings he derives watchfulness. From their victories he acquires courage. The fortitude, patience, and resignation, he transplants into his own life. In their faith and hope, their comfort and joys, he exercises an evangelical communion which makes them all his own.

In their sorrows, also, he experiences a refined and affectionate interest, springing from the very nature of Christian sympathy, and rendering him better and lovelier whenever it is experienced. In this manner, while on the one hand his heart is softened and purified, he acquires, on the other, the rare and difficult science of regulating the affections, and directing wisely the conduct to which they give birth.

2. *Notwithstanding this sameness of character, the views of different Christians concerning the same objects, and the emotions excited by them, are in many respects different.*

It is a remarkable fact, that in the creation and providence of God, we find no two beings or events exactly alike. In this diversity God undoubtedly designed to exhibit the endless diversities of beauty and utility existing in his own endlessly various wisdom; so that every thing might, in some respect, be a new display of his perfect character. In nothing is this variety more conspicuous than in rational minds. These undoubtedly differ not a little in their original structure; and vary unceasingly in their views, affections, and efforts. The very optics of the mind, although possessing the same common nature, are nevertheless so diverse from each other, as to see the same objects in lights often widely different, and to rest on very different parts of each individual object. Let any two persons who have been employed in contemplating the same subject, or viewing the same object, recite their respective views; and this difference will be strongly evinced. All these varieties are also predicable of the human heart. Affections very variously modified are continually awakened in different persons by the same events, even when they have the same common interest. The compassion excited by a scene of distress in a company of friends or neighbours, is proved by their own expressions to have many diversities of shade and character.

All these varieties of thought, feeling, purpose, and exertion, are found every where in Christians, with respect to every religious subject. From this fact it has been often, but rashly concluded, that men were so made, as necessarily to form inconsistent views of the same doctrine, or the same precept: and hence an apology has been made for

error which is intended to excuse it from criminality, and to quiet the minds of men when chargeable with false religious opinions. This scheme attributes to God such indifference to truth, or such love to falsehood, as to have induced him to make men incapable, either from their nature, or from their circumstances of discerning truth and avoiding error. *It is* fairly presumable, that those who hold this scheme, are not intentionally guilty of charging God thus foolishly.

But although God has not made the reception of error necessary, he has plainly formed us so as to receive truth, perhaps necessarily, certainly in a manner highly advantageous to us as social beings, in an unceasing diversity of lights. In a careful investigation of a complicated subject, it is not improbable, that of a thousand persons thus employed, every individual would discern something not discerned by the others; and *that something* true and just. Every thing in the character of man, in his understanding, affections, and habits, contributes to this diversity.

Let me illustrate this subject by a familiar, and at the same time unobjectionable, example. There are in the Scriptures, perhaps, one hundred writers and speakers; all of whom have spoken truth only: while each has yet uttered it in his own characteristical manner. How universally various are these manners; and how much additional beauty, force, and profit, are in this way added to the truth in the mind of every reader! Luke, Paul, and John, are the most voluminous writers in the New Testament; and have communicated the greatest number of doctrines and precepts to mankind. How unlike each other are these writers in their several modes of viewing the interesting subjects which they communicate to mankind! Paul and John particularly are remarkably eloquent and sublime, as well as remarkably instructive. Yet how different is the simple, artless, gentle manner of John, from the bold, ardent, abrupt manner of Paul! Both at the same time are pre-eminently impressive, useful, and happy.

All Christians have their peculiar views of divine subjects, and their peculiar affections. All these also, when just and true, have their own peculiar utility. In the fa-

miliar intercourse of Christians these views are continually interchanged; and these affections mutually communicated. By this interchange the views of all become more just, more expanded, more noble. The varieties of divine excellence, the multiplied relations of divine truth, and the endless modifications of duty, are in this way far more extensively perceived by every one than would otherwise be possible. The difference between the knowledge thus imbibed, and that which would be gained by a Christian in absolute solitude, is substantially the same with that which exists between a savage, and a man educated in enlightened society.

Nor is this mutual communication of affections less improving. Piety, benevolence, and self-government, are capable of being endlessly modified. In a solitary mind it is impossible, in the present state of man, that they should fail of being sluggish, contracted, austere, or in some other unhappy manner defective. Even where persons of *the same sect, class,* or *character,* consort with each other only, a narrow-minded, prejudiced, bigoted, and often very censurable, spirit is diffused, cherished, and confirmed. An expansive correspondence among Christians, on the contrary, enlarges the heart, exalts its feelings, and dignifies its designs. Let it be remembered, that to this immense good every Christian may contribute, whatever is his station, whatever the extent of his talents, and whatever the characteristical tenor of his affections. The greatest may learn and amend by the assistance of the least; the wisest by that of the most uninformed. Thus, *As iron sharpeneth iron, so every* Christian *sharpeneth the countenance of his friend.* Prov. xxvii. 17.

3. *The affections of Christians are strongly invigorated by their frequent intercourse with each other.*

Social beings are formed in such a manner, as to be easily and deeply interested in each other's concerns; and to share in each other's hopes and fears, joys and sorrows. Naturally, and in a sense instinctively, we love when others love, and hate when others hate; exult in their prosperity, and mingle our sighs and tears with theirs. Whenever these emotions are communicated, they are caught. Heart, in this case, beats in regular response to heart; and the bosom

spontaneously heaves, and glows, and throbs, at the call of those by whom we are surrounded. All this is continually seen in the common occurrences of life; particularly in the zeal of parties; the agitations of political assemblies; and the distracted violence of tumultuous crowds. Much more delightfully is it exhibited in the more rational and affectionate meetings of friends; and far more delightfully still in the intercommunion of Christians, the best of all friends. Here, the noblest subjects engage the attention; and the most interesting of all concerns engross the heart; concerns approved by the conscience, and approved by God. In their nature they are fraught with peace: in their progress they are sources of unceasing and immortal good. To every person in such an assembly, *the wisdom which is from above* is the supreme object of pursuit; that *godliness which has the promise of the life which now is, and of that which is to come.* In the pursuit of this glorious object, full of comfort, hope, and joy, the best emotions which can be felt by the human heart, are awakened and reciprocated. The flame which glows in one breast is caught and kindled in another. The light which illumines one mind, sheds its lustre over all the minds by which it is encircled. The soul, raised above itself by this happy communion, feels that it *has passed from death unto life, because it loves the brethren.* On such an assembly the Spirit of grace fails not to shower his balmy influence, and to awaken, in the minds of which it is composed, delightful anticipations of future glory. Peace, and hope, and joy, descending from above, scatter here their richest blessings; and with a divine enchantment raise up a transient but delightful image of heaven on this side of the grave.

REMARKS.

1. *These observations teach us the invaluable blessing of being born in a Christian land.*

In such a land, all these advantages are primarily obtained. There Christians live. There religion is manifested in the life and conversation. There its reality, dignity, solemnity, and loveliness, are seen by the eye and declared to the ear. There *the words of the wise are as goads.* They counsel, exhort, reprove, and alarm, with evangelical power. The

minds of sinners are there awakened in this manner to a sense of their guilt; and urged by motives of singular import, to listen to the alarming denunciations of offended justice, and to the delightful invitations of boundless mercy. There the worth of the soul, its immortal being, and its amazing destinies, are explained and understood. There the charms of a religious example are displayed and felt. There of course a man is taught, allured, and compelled, to provide for his eternal welfare.

In other lands how dreadfully reversed is the scene! What a bleak and barren wilderness, what a dreary solitude, does their moral state present to the compassionate eye! Stretch the wings of your contemplation, and pass over them with a momentary but painful survey. From climate to climate, not a house of God is presented to our eyes; not a pious family; not a religious example. Listen. No voice of prayer rises on the winds. No notes of praise are wafted to the heavens. Look. No sabbath smiles with peace and mercy on the desolate waste. No dews of of divine grace, no showers of life-giving rain, descend on the sterile soil. *The heaven over* their *heads* is *brass: the earth under* their *feet* is *iron.*

2. *The same observations teach us the peculiar blessing of being born in a religious family.*

In such a family religion lives and prospers, is visible and powerful, in a still more emphatical manner. It is seen always: it is seen in the most beautiful attitudes and the fairest colours. It is seen with an influence peculiarly persuasive and heavenly.

In their morning and evening devotions, piety begins and closes the day; prepares the heart to go patiently, serenely, faithfully, and gratefully, through its active concerns; and the eyes to close in peace, and to enjoy the sleep of such as are beloved by God. The interval between these solemn seasons is filled up with successive acts of justice, truth, and kindness to others, and to the happy circle where they originate; and with a watchful, assiduous, and faithful, superintendence of themselves. In the blessings of their intercourse with others, all around them successively share; while their friends and neighbours are delighted, strangers

are welcomed, and their enemies are not excluded. The poor and suffering not only make peculiar claims, but find those claims cheerfully admitted.

With each other, life is only a sweet interchange of lovely affections and evangelical offices; and assumes an aspect on which angels would smile with complacency, and heaven descend in a shower of blessings. Every day which passes over their heads, calls forth from them all new displays of evangelical love, new efforts to make each other happy. Every place furnishes them new opportunities of shewing how much *more blessed it is to give than to receive.* But the sabbath, of all days, surrounds them with peculiar lustre and loveliness. Of all places, the sanctuary most unfolds their excellence, sublimes their virtues, and prepares them to meet *the assembly of the first-born.*

How can those who are young grow up in such a family, in the midst of such conversation, by the side of such examples, and in the sight of such excellence hourly displayed, and fail of becoming wise! The example is that of parents; the most venerable and the most impressive which in this world was ever presented before the eyes. The excellence is that of brothers and sisters; the most lovely, the most alluring, which is found below the sun. Must not *the angels of the Lord encamp round about* such a family? Will not God behold them with uninterrupted and unclouded smiles? Who can be a witness of the piety, the benevolence, of such a family, and not exclaim,

> "Thus on the heavenly hills
> The saints are bless'd above;
> Where joy like morning dew distils,
> And all the air is love?"

3. *These observations teach us the wisdom and goodness of Christ in establishing a church in the world.*

The church is one great family; in which all Christians are united, and enabled to walk together, and derive wisdom from each other. Here their correspondence is intimate; and their advantages are all concentrated. Their instructions, their reproofs, their prayers, their example, are here mutually exhibited and mutually enjoyed. Here also these blessings are perpetuated. Religion here is

visible from day to day, and from age to age; and piety and beneficence shine like the sun with perennial beams. *The Lord loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob. Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God. The Lord hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his habitation. This is my rest for ever; here I will dwell. I will abundantly bless her provision. I will satisfy her poor with bread. I will clothe her priests with salvation; and her saints shall shout aloud for joy.*

In this assembly of the faithful, the word and worship of God, the means of eternal life, and the religion of the gospel, have all been preserved. By the example, the labours, the prayers, and the piety, of the church in one land and in one age, have piety and salvation been extended and perpetuated through other lands and other ages. This is the stem from which have sprung all the blossoms and fruits of righteousness, which have gladdened this desolate world. Here sinners in millions have seen, felt, and acknowledged, the reality and power of religion; and under its divine influence have *turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God. Of Zion it shall be said, "This and that man was born in her." The Lord shall count when he writeth up the people, that this man was born there.*

4. *We hence learn also how important it is, that Christians should adorn their profession with a holy life and conversation.*

Considerations very numerous and highly interesting urge the performance of this duty. On this occasion I shall however omit them all, except those which have been insisted on in this discourse. These ought to be more than sufficient for a design so strongly commended by its own inherent importance, and so necessary to peace of mind and the final approbation of God.

If religion be not fervent in the heart, it will not be conspicuous in the life. If it be not conspicuous in the life, saints will not be edified, and sinners will not be saved.

A dull, cold, stupid heart, and its necessary consequence, a dull, cold, and stupid life, a life resembling more that of a Heathen moralist than that of a disciple of Christ, robs a Christian of his proper usefulness; prevents the comfort

which he might enjoy; and overcasts his brightest hopes of future acceptance. I speak of this man as a Christian; for such Christians there are. Such there were in the church of Sardis; on whom Christ calls to *strengthen the things which remained, which were ready to die.* Nay, there are *churches* of this character. At Sardis there was such a church. But all persons of this character, whether churches or individuals, are mere burdens upon the kingdom of Christ; heavy weights under which Christianity struggles, and languishes, and faints. Their profession is so extensively contradicted by their life, as to wound every good man, and to provoke the censure, scorn, and ridicule, of every bad one. Not only is their own profession esteemed insincere, and themselves regarded as hypocrites; but Christians universally are scandalized for their sakes; and their religion pronounced to be a farce, a pretence, a cheat. The injury done in this manner is incalculable. Instead of improving at their side, in the enjoyment of their communion, and by means of their example: Christians learn from them only to be dull and slothful as *they* are; to languish in all their duty; and, although they have *a name to live,* to become the subjects of such a benumbing torpor, as is scarcely distinguishable from the chill of death.

In the mean time, unrenewed men, discerning the mighty difference between the religion described and required in the gospel, and that which is displayed in the lives of such professors, not unnaturally, though very unhappily, conclude, that practical religion is no where to be found. To induce this conclusion, such examples need not be very numerous; but whenever they become frequent, it is drawn of course. Thus, by a lukewarm life, and a profession violated by stupidity and negligence, the hearts of Christians are broken, and the salvation of sinners prevented. Vice and infidelity in the mean time rear their heads in triumph. *The ways of Zion mourn, because few come to her solemn feasts;* and the path to heaven is trodden only by here and there a solitary traveller. He who would not be chargeable with the guilt of effectuating these deplorable evils, must *awake to righteousness;* must watch, and strive, and pray, alway; must resolve to *do whatever his hand findeth to do with his might;* and must remember, that *the day* is approaching

when *every man's work shall be made manifest: for that day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire.*

SERMON CXLVI.

THE ORDINARY MEANS OF GRACE.

RELIGIOUS MEDITATION.

Ponder the path of thy feet; and let all thy ways be established.—PROV. IV. 26.

OUR next subject of consideration, in the order formerly proposed, is *religious meditation.*

This duty is enjoined in the text. *Ponder,* says David to Solomon, *the path of thy feet; and let all thy ways be established.* By *the path* here mentioned is undoubtedly intended *the course of life, including all the thoughts, affections, and conduct, of the man.* The latter clause is rendered in the margin, *And all thy ways shall be ordered aright.* The consequence therefore of pondering our course of life is here declared to be, *that all our ways shall be ordered aright.* Of course the text obviously contains this doctrine,

That habitual, religious meditation is a direct mean of our present and eternal well-being.

This subject I shall discuss under two heads:

I. *Religious meditation* generally considered:

II. *Self-examination.*

Of the former of these I observe,

1. *That it alone enables us to make religious truths a part of our own system of thought.*

Knowledge is never of very serious use to man, until it has become a part of his customary course of thinking. This is accomplished, when by familiar acquaintance we are enabled to call it up to view at pleasure; to arrange the parts so as easily to comprehend the whole; to perceive readily their mutual connexion and dependance; to dis-

cern the evidence by which each is supported; to refer each to its proper place; and to judge concerning the whole with correctness and expedition. In this manner every man of common sense thinks concerning every subject with which he is well acquainted: and the power of thinking in this manner he gains only by meditation. Whatever information we may possess, it is of no serious use to us until it is *thus made our own*. The knowledge which barely passes through the mind, resembles that which is gained of a country by a traveller who is whirled through it in a stage; or by a bird flitting over it in his passage to another.

No interesting subject is examined by the mind in this cursory way. Every such subject it instinctively turns over and over; and never desists until it has gained a familiar and comprehensive knowledge of the whole. In this situation, we may be said to understand a subject, so as *to constitute it a part of our system of thought, and to make it a directory of our opinions and conduct.*

This truth is at least as applicable to religious subjects as to others. Whatever knowledge we derive, either from the Bible or from other sources of instruction, is thus made our own only by meditation.

2. *Meditation enables us to feel religious subjects with strength and efficacy.*

Every person who has attended to the state of his own mind, must have discovered that there is a wide difference between *perceiving* and *feeling;* and that of two things equally understood, one has passed lightly over his mind; while the other has left a deep impression. A religious man particularly will easily remember, that the truths of the gospel have at times barely swept the surface of his *mind;* and at others have powerfully affected his *heart*. He will easily remember that the same things, whether arguments, images, or motives, have affected him in these widely different manners. If he will bestow a little pains on this subject, he will farther remember, that he has often been astonished at this fact; and has looked back to find what mysterious cause prevented him from realizing at one time, what he so deeply felt at another.

That, and that only, which we feel, moves us to useful ac-

tion. What is merely perceived or understood, scarcely moves us at all. The *pipe* must be relished before the *dancing* will begin. The *mourning* must be felt before we shall unite in *the lamentation.* A great proportion of mankind, in Christian countries, believe loosely and generally the divine origin and the genuine doctrines of the Scriptures. But while they thus believe, they live, and feel, and act, just as if there were no Scriptures. Almost all men believe the existence and government of God. Still they live as if there were no God; or as if he exercised no government over the world, or over themselves. Multitudes believe that Christ is the Saviour of men; and yet never think of applying to him for their own salvation.

Religious meditation is the only method in which men learn to feel the concerns of religion. In this method, the doctrines, precepts, and motives, presented to us in the Scriptures, which are quietly and carelessly admitted by most men in Christian countries, and which thus neither amend the life nor affect the heart, are, when often and deeply pondered, brought home to the soul; set strongly before its view; applied to itself; and felt to be of real and momentous import. In this way we begin to fear and hope to mourn and rejoice, to desire and loathe; and to seek and shun them according to their respective natures. In this way only do we regard the things of religion with profit to ourselves, and consider them with an efficacious attention. In every other situation of mind we are *settled upon,* our *lees,* and instinctively say, *The Lord will not do good: neither will the Lord do evil.*

3. *Religious meditation renders the thoughts and affections thus gained habitual.*

Nothing in the moral concerns of man is of much importance to him until it is formed into a habit. Every opinion, and every impression, which is transiently entertained, is entertained to little purpose. If it produce any consequences, they are momentary and useless. In the mean time, other things of an unhappy tendency having already become habitual, and possessing the controlling power of habit, return with speed and violence, and drive away the feeble and short-lived influence of such opinions and impressions.

Thus that which if continued might become the *glory* and *beauty of man, is as the flower of the grass. The grass whithereth, and the flower thereof falleth away.*

Habits are formed only by repetition. That which is often repeated becomes, by the mere tendency of nature, more and more interesting and necessary; and acquires therefore a daily increasing power over man. After it has continued for a season, and gained a certain degree of strength, it becomes in a sense immoveable; acquires a decisive control over the conduct; and is rarely, and not without extreme difficulty, overcome.

This influence of habit seems to be inwrought, as a primary characteristic, in the very nature of intelligent beings. No other consideration will explain, at least in many situations, the permanent continuance of either virtue or vice. Under this influence only does the drunkard resist all motives, and adhere immoveably to his cups; the idler to his sloth; the swearer to his profaneness; the spendthrift to his prodigality; the thief to his stealing; and all other sinners to their respective iniquities. Under this influence, the mature Christian overcomes the most powerful temptations; and advances firmly to the rack or the fagot. Under the same influence will the inhabitants of hell persist in their rebellion, in spite of all the motives which so powerfully persuade them to cease from sin. Finally, *the church of the first-born*, and *the innumerable company of angels*, will, under the same influence also, persevere in their obedience, whatever temptation may solicit them to revolt from God.

Moral habits, their strength, and their consequences, are all produced by a repetition of those things of which they are constituted in the mind. In other words, they are produced by frequent meditation on the several subjects out of which they are formed, together with a repeated indulgence of the emotions which such meditation creates. Ultimately therefore they grow out of religious meditation.

Of *self-examination*, proposed as the second head of discourse, I observe,

1. *That it alone makes us acquainted with ourselves.*

Every man has a certain moral character; partly like that of others, and partly peculiar to himself. This cha-

racter, in both respects, is incapable of being known without self-examination. Our own *hearts answer* generally to the *hearts* of others, *as the face to the face in water*. By knowing our own hearts only, can we therefore know effectually the general character of man. It may perhaps be said, that this character is delineated with perfect exactness and supreme skill in the Scriptures; and by searching them may therefore be known. The position I admit; the consequence I deny. The instruction given us in the Scriptures concerning this subject will never be understood, unless applied to ourselves in the examination of our own hearts. Invaluable as the knowledge is which they communicate concerning this subject, it is, like all other knowledge, never realized, never made our own, except by meditation.

But there are many things in our own characters which are peculiar to ourselves. All these exist in the heart alone: and there only can they be either taught or learned. Even the very opinions which we entertain, together with the manner and degree in which we entertain them, will ever be imperfectly understood by us without this investigation for ourselves. We suppose ourselves to embrace many opinions which a critical inquiry will shew we have never received. Many others we imagine ourselves to have admitted without a doubt, which by this trial we shall find regarded by us only in an uncertain and conjectural manner.

Still more ignorant are we of our dispositions. About no subject have the apprehensions of man been more erroneous than about his will, affections, and propensities. Self-knowledge in this respect chiefly has been proverbially acknowledged to be extremely difficult, as well as highly important. Hence the memorable observation, *Id, γνωθι σεαυτον, e cœlo descendit:* an observation grounded perhaps equally on the usefulness and the difficulties of the precept. Whatever man can accomplish in this arduous concern, must be accomplished by self-examination. He must watch carefully every moment of his disposition; the commencement and the progress of every affection, aim, resolution, and habit; the manner in which every thing affects him; and the means by which he is affected; the causes of his success and his failures in regulating the

state of his mind; and generally all his movements within, and all his impulses from without.

In this way, and in this alone, can the sinner learn effectually, that he is a sinner. In this way only will he discern the nature and extent of his guilt; the strength of his evil propensities; the obstinacy of his unbelief and impenitence; the uniformity of his disobedience; the completeness of his ruin; his exposure to final condemnation; and his utter indisposition to return to God. All these things he learns only and effectually, by observing them as they exist and operate in himself; or arise as consequences from the state of his own mind. Whatever knowledge he may possess of them from instruction, even from that of the Scriptures; it can never be of any serious use to him until he has made it his own by an investigation of his heart and life. Whatever he may have heard or read of sin, and guilt, and danger; it is to him merely news concerning other men; not knowledge of himself. Other men, according to the views which he entertains before he commences the examination of himself, are sinners, odious to God, children of wrath, and in danger of perdition. But for himself he is almost innocent, and perhaps entirely safe. Should you prove the contrary to him by arguments which he will acknowledge to be unanswerable; you have gained nothing. The application to himself will still be wanting: and the story might almost as well have been told to another person, or communicated in an unknown tongue.

In the same manner only does the Christian learn, that he is a Christian. To decide this great point, even hopefully, his heart and his life must pass before him in continual review. The doctrines by which he is governed, the affections which he exercises, the actions which he performs, and with which they are performed, must be daily scrutinized: and from them all must be derived the momentous result. With this diligent investigation of himself, no man, however long or however eminently he has possessed the Christian character, can, even with well-founded hope, conclude that he is a Christian. In the same manner also must every question which we ask concerning our moral character be answered. Unless we thus explore ourselves,

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whatever may be our state, we cannot understand it; and shall on the one hand be exposed to all its evils, and lose on the other no small part of its blessings.

2. *Self-examination naturally prepares men to turn from sin to holiness, and to advance from one degree of holiness to another.*

Conviction of sin is eminently the result of *self-examination;* as I think must already be evident to a very moderate attention. Equally applicable is this remark to all apprehensions concerning our future destiny; all efficacious fears concerning the anger of God; all affecting views of our helplessness; all thorough convictions of the necessity of betaking ourselves to Christ for salvation. *They that are whole need not a physician.* But all are whole, in the sense intended by our Saviour, until convinced of their diseased condition by solemnly attending to their own case. So long as this is not done, there will be no recourse to the Physician of the soul.

Two objections, or at least two difficulties, may here perhaps arise in the minds of my audience. One is, that *the effect which I have attributed to self-examination, is to be attributed to the Spirit of grace.* The other is, *that I have elsewhere attributed the same effect to prayer.* On the former I observe, that the Spirit of grace operates on the mind, in this state of its moral concerns, chiefly by leading it to a solemn investigation of itself. On the latter I observe, that prayer has this efficacy in the manner recited in a former discourse principally by prompting us to examine ourselves more effectually than any other exercise of the mind, and more thoroughly to explore our moral condition. Self-examination is the primary mean by which the Spirit of God brings the soul into this state. This glorious agent can, I acknowledge, accomplish this work in any other manner which he shall choose. But this seems plainly to be the manner in which it is usually accomplished. Indeed, it seems difficult to conceive how convictions of sin, whatever might be their cause, could exist, at least to any extent, without self-examination. To such convictions it seems absolutely necessary, that the soul should know its own

guilt: and to this knowledge it seems equally indispensable, that it should explore its own moral character and conduct.

Of prayer it may be truly said, that its nature is very imperfectly understood by him who does not know, that to a considerable extent it is employed in the most solemn, the most intimate, and the most effectual, examination of ourselves. The advantages which prayer furnishes for this employment, are singular and supreme. But no man will ever avail himself of them, who does not more or less occupy the intervals between the seasons of prayer, in *communing* diligently *with his own heart*. It was in this view of prayer, that I exhibited it as contributing so efficaciously to a solemn conviction of his guilt in the mind of the sinner.

Nor is this employment less effectual in enabling us to advance from one degree of grace to another. To do this the Christian must know his present and past condition; that he may renounce whatever is amiss, and retain whatever is commendable. Unless he know his sins, how can he renounce them? Unless he know his weaknesses, how can he guard against them? Unless he perceive the means of his success in past cases, how can he adopt them again? Unless he discern the causes of former failures, how can he be safe from future ones? If he have no acquaintance with his backslidings, how can he either repent or reform? If he be ignorant of the means by which he has heretofore improved in holiness, how can he be enabled to improve hereafter? Thus the most important conduct of man, as a moral being, is eminently dependant on the investigation of himself.

From self-examination also spring, in a great measure, all our resolutions of amendment. The seasons in which, by looking into ourselves, we learn our guilt, our danger, and the indispensable necessity of an alteration in our lives, are those in which the mind exerts itself in earnest to accomplish such alteration. In this situation alone are resolutions made of sufficient strength and solemnity materially to affect the life. To resolve firmly against any evil, we must feel it. To resolve with efficacy on the pursuit of any good, we must realize, that in an important sense it is good to us.

Finally, some of the most affecting views of the divine

character grow out of this employment. God is never seen in the most interesting manner, except when seen in relation to ourselves. Whether we regard his hatred of sin, and his determinations to execute vengeance on the impenitent; or his boundless goodness in forgiving, redeeming, and sanctifying, mankind; we see these things in a far clearer light, and feel them with far greater strength, as exercised directly about ourselves, than as employed about others. When we come to discern our own sins, their guilt, and their aggravations, we first begin to form proper views of the awful justice of God in our condemnation. At the same time, the first sound and affecting apprehensions which we entertain of the goodness of God, are awakened by a strong sense of our own need of his mercy, and an humble hope of our own interest in his forgiving love.

The omnipresence of God is then only realized, when we consider him as present with ourselves; as dwelling with us, and around us. The omniscience of God is never brought to the view of the mind, until it regards him as exploring its own recesses, tracing all its secret windings, and accompanying itself with his all-seeing eye, while employed in unravelling the mysteries of its own iniquity. Generally God is seen and realized in our religious meditations, particularly in those which are directed to our own hearts, to be a vastly different being from that which we imagine for ourselves in loose contemplation and lukewarm inquiry.

From these observations it is evident, that religious meditations is not only the effect, but the cause also, of that soberness of mind exhibited in the Scriptures as indispensably necessary to sound wisdom. Of this character it scarcely needs to be observed, the benefits are numberless, and surpassing estimation.

3. *Self-examination is a principal source of self-government, and therefore, of peace of mind, and solid enjoyment.*

On the knowledge of ourselves, obtained in this manner only; the knowledge of our imperfections, passions, appetites, sins, temptations, and dangers; and an acquaintance with such means as we possess, of strength, encouragement, and safety; our self-government almost entirely depends.

In acquiring the knowledge of these things, we both learn how to govern ourselves, and gradually obtain an earnest and fixed desire to perform this duty.

Without self-examination there can be little self-government: without self-government there can be no peace of mind. Peace of mind is the result only of a consciousness of having done our duty. But of this duty self-government is one of the three great branches: the other two being piety to God, and beneficence to mankind. These can never be separately performed. Evangelical virtue, the only spirit with which either was ever truly performed, is a thing perfectly *one;* without any variety or division in its nature. Towards all the objects of our duty, whether God, our neighbour, or ourselves, it operates in the same manner.

Besides, self-government is indispensable, in its very nature, to the performance of all other duty. This might be evinced with respect to every case in which duty can be performed; but may be sufficiently illustrated in the following. If we do not control our envy, wrath, or revenge; we cannot be contented, meek, or forgiving. If we do not subdue our selfishness; we can never, in the sense of the gospel, love either God or mankind.

But without recurrence to these proofs, the case is perfectly plain in its own nature. In the experience of every man it is abundantly evident, that, so long as his passions and appetites are unsubdued, they keep the mind in a continual agitation. The appetites are syrens, which sing only to deceive; and charm only to destroy. He who listens to them, is certain of being shipwrecked in the end. The passions are equally dangerous, equally fatal, by their violence; and toss the soul with tempestuous fury on billows which never rest. Without a pilot, without a compass, without a helm, no hope of safety remains for the unhappy voyager, but in the hushing of the storm, and the subsidence of the tumultuous ocean.

Ungoverned desire, and fear, and rage, and revenge, dwell only in the gloom of a dungeon, and in the midst of maniacs. Into such a cell it is impossible for soft-eyed, gentle-minded peace even to enter. From such companions she can only fly. These unclean spirits must be subdued, and chained, and banished; their curses and blasphemies must

have died upon the ear; the windows of their mansion must be opened to the light of day; the house must be swept and garnished anew; before this divine guest can be induced to bless the habitation with her presence, her smiles, and her joys.

But without peace of conscience, there is, there can be no solid, rational, lasting enjoyment. Real and enduring good must begin at home. The soul which is not self-approved, can never hope for the approbation of God. The soul which is not at peace with itself, cannot be at peace with its Maker; nor exercise a pacific spirit towards its fellow-creatures. What real good then can it hope for? What permanent enjoyment can it possibly share?

REMARKS.

1. *From these observations it is plain, that religious meditation is of high importance to mankind.*

It has been shewn, if I am not deceived, that from this source are derived our profitable possession of religious instruction, whence soever obtained; our realizing useful sense of religious things of every kind; our attainment of desirable habits, both of thinking and feeling; our knowledge of ourselves; our best preparation to turn from sin, and to advance through superior degrees of holiness; and our self-government, peace of mind, and solid enjoyment. Each of these benefits is sufficiently great to justify the remark which has been made above: and all of them united place religious meditation in a light, eminently strong, clear, and affecting. As a mean of salvation it holds a high rank, a place of distinguished importance. Most reasonably, most kindly, then, are we required to *prove ourselves*, to *examine ourselves, whether we be in the faith*, obedience, and kingdom, of God. Most mercifully are we directed to *ponder the path of life*; for the natural, the proper, the inestimable, consequence is, that all *our ways will be ordered aright*.

2. *The same observations teach us the pre-eminent folly of those who neglect religious meditation, especially the examination of themselves.*

In the minds of these persons, instructions from abroad

will be like furniture thrown into a garret; out of place, and out of use; incapable, until it shall have been arranged in its proper order, of being applied to any valuable purpose. In these minds also, nothing good will be either strongly felt or habitually exercised. Every moral, every valuable thing, whether a truth, a precept, or an affection; will in such minds float at random, as the down of the thistle through the atmosphere. In the moment of its appearance it will vanish. The best purposes, the firmest resolves, of such minds are mere abortions; and exist only to expire.

Men of this character can never become possessed of self-knowledge: a kind of knowledge so useful, so excellent, that even the Heathen supposed the precept enjoining it to have descended from heaven. If they are deformed by sin; if they are in the most imminent hazard of ruin; they can never know this as it ought to be known. They can neither understand nor feel their real guilt, their real danger, or the real necessity of providing for their escape. They are therefore utterly unprepared to *turn from the error of their ways,* and *to save their souls alive.*

There are in the Christian world men who, under the influence of strong convictions of conscience, and with the aid of that anxious investigation of themselves which always accompanies such convictions, have by *the influence of the Holy Ghost* been *turned from darkness to light,* and *from the power of Satan unto God;* and who yet have afterward become lukewarm in religion, and, with a *Laodicean* spirit, in a great measure ceased to *commune with their own hearts.* All these persons linger at the point where they originally stood; and yield up both the means and the hopes of improvement in the Christian character. I do not intend that this is *absolutely* the fact: for no Christian is absolutely destitute of self-examination. But so far as this destitution exists, he who is the subject of it will cease to keep *his body and spirit in subjection;* to *grow in grace;* to acquire peace of conscience, and *joy in the Holy Ghost.*

Why do *sinners* refuse to examine themselves; and to gain the blessings to which this conduct gives birth? Plainly because they are too much slothful, or too much alarmed

at the thought of uncovering the mass of sin and guilt in their hearts. Thus they would rather decline every hope of good, than encounter the labour of searching themselves, or turn their eyes upon the dismal prospect within. The latter is the usual and predominant evil. The picture is too deformed; too dreadful; and sooner than behold it they will run the hazard of damnation. But is not knowledge always better than ignorance? Is not truth always more profitable than delusion? To know the truth in this case might prove the means of eternal life. To continue ignorant of it cannot fail to terminate in their ruin. What folly can be more complete than to hazard this tremendous evil, rather than to encounter the pain of looking into ourselves: a pain abundantly overpaid by the profit which is its certain consequence. Such persons hoodwink themselves, and then feel safe from the evils of the precipice to which they are advancing, because they cannot see their danger. They make the darkness in which they grope, and stumble, and fall.

3. *These observations also teach us, that this neglect is inexcusable.*

Meditation on every moral and religious subject is always in our power. Every man is able to look into himself, and into every moral subject concerning which he has been instructed. Nor is the performance of this duty attended with any real difficulty. The motives to it are infinite. God has required it: our own temporal and eternal interest indispensably demands it. The benefits of it are immense. Sloth only, and a deplorable dread of knowing what we are, can be alleged in behalf of our neglect.

But to how low a situation must he be reduced, how forlorn must be his condition, who can plead for his conduct, in so interesting a case, no reasons but these. Can these reasons excuse him even to himself? Will they excuse him before the bar of God? What can even self-flattery, with her silver tongue, allege in his behalf, but that he is too slothful, or too indifferent to the command of God. This is worse than the wretched plea of *the unprofitable servant* in the parable. Even he was able to say, that he thought his master was *an austere man*, and *hard* in his requisitions.

But whatever may be thought of these excuses, let no sinner pretend that he has laboured for eternal life, until he has thoroughly examined his heart, and devoted himself to religious contemplation. This is a duty which every man can perform; a duty to which every man is bound; a duty in the way of which reason can find no obstacle. He who will not perform it ought therefore to say, that he *will not;* and to acknowledge, that he values the indulgence of his sloth, or the sluggish quiet of self-ignorance, more than the salvation of his soul.

SERMON CXLVII.

THE ORDINARY MEANS OF GRACE.

THE DUTY OF EDUCATING CHILDREN RELIGIOUSLY. OBJECTIONS.

Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.—PROV. XXII. 6.

THE next subject of inquiry, in the order proposed, is

The religious education of children.

In a former discourse I observed, that the word *train* originally denotes, *to draw along by a regular and steady course of exertions;* and is hence very naturally used to signify *drawing from one action to another by persuasions, promises, and other efforts, continually repeated. The way in which a child should go,* as was also observed in that discourse, is undoubtedly *the way in which it is best for him to go;* particularly *with respect to his eternal well-being.* With this explanation the text will be seen,

I. *To enjoin upon parents the religious education of their children.*

II. *To teach the manner in which this duty should be performed.*

III. *To promise a blessing to such as faithfully discharge this duty; and thus to present powerful motives to the performance.*

These I shall examine in the order proposed.

The duty enjoined in the text has, by multitudes of mankind, been strenuously denied. "Children religiously educated," say these persons, "will regularly be biassed to one side of the case, and equally prejudiced against the other. Should they then believe in the divine revelation of the Scriptures, and adopt any one of those numerous systems of doctrines and precepts which have existed in the Christian world; their belief would spring from prejudice only, and not from candour, investigation, or evidence. Consequently it will be destitute alike of solid support and useful efficacy. Children would therefore be incomparably better situated, were they permitted to grow up without any extraneous impulse with respect to religion; and, being thus unprejudiced, would select for themselves, with much more probability, whatever is true and right."

To oppose this scheme will be the design of the following discourse: and in the progress of the opposition, all the proofs of the propriety of performing this duty may be advantageously alleged. As the scheme is addressed to Christians, the arguments against it must be also addressed to Christians. I observe then,

1. *That the mind, when uneducated, is a mere blank with respect to all useful knowledge; and with respect to the knowledge of moral subjects as truly as any other.*

Both infidels and others (for unhappily there are others who adopt this scheme) will acknowledge the truth of the proposition here asserted. It will therefore need no proof. What then will be the consequence of the omission contended for? The uneducated child will grow up without any knowledge of moral subjects, until the season allotted by God for instruction, and the only useful season, is past: all future instructions will find his attachments and his memory preoccupied; and will make and leave feeble impressions, little regarded and soon forgotten. His passions and appetites, having from the beginning increased their strength by the mere course of nature, and the want of seasonable control, will effectually resist every attempt to communicate and impress such doctrines as oppose their favourite dictates. The authority and influence of the pa-

rent also, which are indispensably necessary to infix all important lessons in the mind of the child, will, in a great measure, have ceased. Of course the instruction thus given will slide over the understanding, and leave no trace of their existence upon the heart.

Besides, the child will naturally believe, that things so long untaught, cannot in the parent's own view be of any serious consequence. Instinctively will he say, "If these things are true, and of such importance; why have I hitherto been kept a stranger to them? I might have died in my childhood, or in my youth. Had this been the case, where should I have been now? Did parental tenderness disregard the eternal well-being of my soul, and leave me to become an outcast of heaven; merely because I had not arrived at adult years? Is then the eternal life of the soul at twelve or fifteen of no value; and at twenty-five of infinite importance? Can it be, that I am destined to endless happiness or misery; and yet, that *my father*, and still more *my mother*, should have felt this vast subject, and loved me so little, as to let me lie to the present hour in profound ignorance of this amazing destination? Had I died before this time, I had died *for lack of vision*. The things themselves are therefore not true. At least, they have never been seriously believed by those from whom I have derived my being." To these remonstrances, it is hardly necessary to observe, there could be no satisfactory answer.

At the period proposed therefore, the instructions in question would be useless. The mind, already grown up with those views only which a savage entertains of moral subjects; few, gross, false, and fatal; would now be incapable of imbibing better; and in the chief concern of man would continue, notwithstanding all the light and all the blessings of the gospel, a savage for ever.

2. *If children are not educated to just moral principles, they will of course imbibe those which are false.*

The mind is by nature prone to wrong. By this I intend, that it is prone to forget God; to exercise towards him neither love, reverence, gratitude, nor submission; to be governed by selfish, and not benevolent, affections towards mankind; and to indulge pride, envy, wrath, sloth, lewdness, intemperance, and lightness of mind. In a word, it

is prone to be impious, unkind, insincere, unjust, and dissolute. These and the like things, notwithstanding the ingenious discoveries of infidel philosophy, I call wrong; because they are beyond a doubt dishonourable and displeasing to God, injurious to our fellow-men, and debasing to ourselves. They do no good; and produce all the evil which exists. That the human race are naturally prone to these things is certain; because children evince their propensity to them as soon as they commence moral action. Every man, who sees at all, sees some or other of these characteristics in every one except himself.

There are but two methods in which these propensities may be either removed or checked; the grace and providence of God, and the labour of man: I mean, the labour of man, especially when in the best manner exerted, in the beginning of life, to educate children in virtue. That *God* may be expected to remove, or even to check, them will hardly be admitted by most of the men against whom I am contending. But they will universally acknowledge, that the labours of *man* are important to this end; and that they coincide in their efficacy, if he acts at all, with the agency of God. So far then as these evils can be exterminated or restrained, the labours of man are not only useful but indispensable.

Childhood is the seed-time of life; the season in which every thing sown in the mind springs up readily, grows with peculiar vigour, and produces an abundant harvest. In this happy season, the garden is fitted by the Author of our being for the best cultivation. If good seeds are then sown, valuable productions may be confidently expected; if not, weeds of every rank and poisonous kind will spring up of themselves, of which no future industry will be able to cleanse the soil.

What is implanted in childhood takes deep root also; and can never be eradicated in future life. The principles established in this golden period, are regarded with more veneration and attachment, are retained longer, and are more powerfully operative, than any other. They reappear after having been for a great length of time invisible, and renew their energy after having been supposed hopelessly extinct. Such then being confessedly the importance and strength

of early instructions; how interesting must it be in the view of every sober man to prevent, while they can be prevented, the immense evils of wrong principles; and to secure, while they can be secured, the inestimable benefits of those which are right.

The child who is not religiously educated in the dawn of life must, even with the happiest future advantages, be ignorant of many interesting moral doctrines, during all that season in which doctrines are capable of high and happy influence. In the mean time, *he will also imbibe many others which are false and malignant.* No man is better than his principles will make him. Virtue is nothing but voluntary obedience to truth. Vice is nothing but voluntary obedience to falsehood. The doctrines which he obeys, will form his whole character. If they are false, they will form him to sin, to odiousness, and to ruin; and that they will be false, at least chiefly, if he is left to choose for himself, needs no proof. Thus the child, left, according to this scheme, without a religious education, will become a savage in his morals; not from disposition only, but from ignorance also. In his mind there will be no good principles to counteract the bad; nothing to enlighten or direct him in the path of virtue; nothing to suggest the necessity, the wisdom, or the duty, of resisting sin and avoiding temptation. Such a child will of course become a mere beast of prey; and he who sends him out into society, is more hostile to its peace, than he who unchains a wolf and turns him loose into the street.

3. *The abettors of this scheme contradict it in their own conduct.*

Many of these men assiduously teach their children industry, economy, justice, veracity, and kindness to their fellow-men. Why do they educate their children in this manner? They will answer, Because they think these things useful to their children; and childhood the time in which they can be most effectually taught. Let us examine their conduct by their own rules.

All these things are by a part, and not a small part, of mankind denied to be useful. They are of course in dispute. I return them therefore their own reasoning; and say, "You ought not to teach your children *industry*, until

they are grown to adult years; lest they should practise industry through prejudice, and not from candour and conviction. Multitudes think sloth preferable to industry. Why do you forestall the judgment of your children; and give them by education a bias to the other side of this question?

"Why do you teach them economy? Great numbers of mankind, and among them many persons of superior talents, have thought profusion preferable to economy; and have proved the sincerity of their opinion by their own prodigality. The question is hitherto undecided. You ought not to prejudice the minds of your children; but leave them to examine for themselves.

"Why do you teach them justice? Fraud has a numerous train of advocates, who will strenuously urge the error of your judgment. Ought not your children to find the field of decision unoccupied?

"Why do you teach them truth? *David said in his haste, that all men were liars:* and universal experience proves, that the number is very great of those who think truth of little value. Preclude not your children from the chance of judging candidly on this important question?

"Why do you so sedulously teach them *kindness?* Mark the vast mulitude of those who prove by their conduct, that they think this attribute a weak and contemptible characteristic of man. You are therefore prejudicing your children concerning this subject, which is far from being settled, and of pre-eminent importance to their success in the world. All these things are as strenuously opposed and disputed in the world, as *piety, faith, repentance, or evangelical good-will.* There is therefore no justification of your conduct on this ground.

"Can you pretend that piety is not as rational and as important to man, as either of the things which you enjoin upon your children? If love and reverence to God are not important, nothing is. All good comes from God. When he gives, we enjoy; when he withholds, we are destitute. But he cannot be expected to give; he certainly will not give, to those who finally neither love nor reverence his character. If he is not believed nor trusted, he cannot be reverenced nor loved. Without *faith* therefore, piety cannot exist. It

sin be not hated, regretted, nor renounced; or, in other words, *repented of;* piety will in like manner be impossible.

"Besides, you teach your children as you teach others, both with diligence and ardour, to disbelieve, despise, and hate, the Scriptures. The Scriptures, you know, profess themselves to be a revelation from God. To the question whether they are such a revelation, Christians believe the positive, and you the negative, answer. You will not deny that they have the same right to adopt their belief, and their consequent obedience, which you have to adopt your disbelief, and your consequent disobedience. Neither can you doubt, that he who believes with the best evidence, is the wisest man. *Their* arguments you have utterly failed to answer. *Your* objections they claim to have refuted; and can plead this strong proof of the justice of their claim, furnished by yourselves, that for many years you have quitted the field of discussion. On good grounds, therefore, they regard you as vanquished. In *this* respect, at least, you must acknowledge, that they have an advantage over you, which is infinite. *Should the Scriptures prove to be false, they will lose nothing by believing them. Should they prove to be true, you will gain nothing, and lose your all.*

"The case of yourselves and Christian parents, is the case of *your children* and *theirs*. By teaching your children to disbelieve the Scriptures, you expose them to infinite loss. Christians, by teaching their children to believe the Scriptures, do what is in their power to secure to them infinite gain. You may therefore be challenged to shew, that their conduct is not wiser and more defensible than yours.

"But it is enough for the present purpose, that you prove yourselves insincere in your scheme by pursuing the contrary conduct. You prove unanswerably that, in your opinion, children ought diligently to be taught that system of moral principles, which you think good and useful. The conduct to which you object in Christians is exactly the same. All that they teach they think good; eminently good, and infinitely useful."

4. *As virtue is nothing but obedience to truth; so truth must be taught* before *virtue can be practised.*

If the former part of this position be admitted, the latter will be self-evident. As the former cannot be denied with even a pretence of argument, I shall take it for granted, that truth must be taught to children, in order to render them virtuous. But the religion of the Scriptures is the only system of truth which will make children virtuous. This I say with confidence, because no other system of doctrines has ever made men virtuous. Cicero testifies this of the western heathen philosophy. The Brahmans frankly acknowledge it of the eastern.* Every man, of common information, knows it to be true of infidel philosophy.

If then children are to be rendered virtuous, while they are children, that is, while there is the best reason to hope that they may become virtuous, they must be educated in the religious system of the Scriptures.

5. *Virtue is a simple, indivisible thing; and must therefore exist, and be taught, entire, or not at all.*

There never was an instance, in which a man was possessed of half the character of virtue; or in which he exercised the affections, and voluntarily performed the duties, of virtue towards one class of objects and not towards another, and towards all. A man may unquestionably be virtuous, and yet not perfectly virtuous: but it is impossible that he should be the subject of piety, and not of benevolence; or of benevolence, and not of piety. It is impossible that he should *love God, whom he hath not seen, and hate*, or *not love, his brother, whom he hath seen.* It is equally impossible to love our fellow-creatures, and not love him, who made, preserves, and blesses, both us and them. Equally impossible is it, as was shewn in the preceding discourse, to love either God or man, without governing our selfish passions. Thus it is plain, that virtue cannot exist in parcels, or by halves.

As virtue cannot exist in this manner; so it cannot, to any purpose, be taught in this manner. The whole use of teaching is to effectuate the practical end of the instructions which are given. If these are limited in such a man-

* They declare, that in the present *yogue* all men are only sinful. See Asiat. Research.; Maur. Ind. Antiq.; and Bapt. Miss. Reports.

ner as not to comprise the object in view, they will necessarily fail of their effect. Partial instructions on this subject fall utterly short of teaching what virtue is; and must therefore he fruitless. *Virtue is love to God, love to mankind, and the subordination of all our passions to this great affection.* If this be not taught, nothing is taught to the purpose in view. The very doctrine, that a part of this is virtue, will, by leading him into a fundamental and fatal error, effectually prevent the child from becoming virtuous. Thus the Christian system alone teaches what virtue is; and leads alone to the attainment of this glorious attribute, and the practical obedience of its dictates. If children then are not religiously educated; they will be perfectly destitute of all human aid towards becoming virtuous. Should they die before they arrive at adult years they must, if this scheme be pursued, die without a hope.

6. *If children are not religiously educated, they will, instead of being candid, be strongly prejudiced against Christianity.*

The professed intention of those with whom I contend, is to establish candour in the minds of children, and prevent them from bias and prejudice. This undoubtedly wears a fair appearance; but, like many other specious things, is false and hollow. Children, by means of the evil propensities which I have mentioned, are naturally prejudiced against every thing which is morally good. They are unfriendly to the Scriptures, to God, and to their duty; and are prone to all unbelief, and to all sin. The sin which they love and practise, the Scriptures forbid; and threaten the commission of it with the most awful penalties. Still they choose to practise it; and therefore hate the Scriptures by which it is thus forbidden and threatened. Thus their minds are spontaneously prejudiced against the religion of the Scriptures. If then they are not religiously educated, the very bias, the very want of candour, which the authors of this scheme professedly design to prevent, will exist of course in the highest degree. Thus the scheme defeats itself; and frustrates the only purpose for which it is proposed.

These truths are obvious in fact; particularly in the con-

duct of the objectors themselves. Both they and their children are always prejudiced against Christianity. Among all the infidels whom I have known, I do not recollect an individual who appeared to me to have examined thoroughly even the objections of infidels against the Scriptures, much less the arguments which have been adduced by Christians in support of their divine origin. I do not remember one who appeared to have investigated, with serious attention, the truth, evidence, or excellence, of the doctrines which they contain. So far as my knowledge extends, they have all rejected them both in the gross, and without a single earnest inquiry. Such cannot be the conduct either of candour or common sense.

7. *Children, however religiously educated, cannot think too favourably of Christianity; and in this sense cannot be prejudiced.*

The Christian system is the only system of moral truth; and Christianity is the only real virtue. *All things pertaining to life and to godliness* are revealed in the Scriptures, either expressly, or by plain and necessary implication. Man has added nothing defensible to what they contain, on the subjects of duty and salvation, the character of God, or the moral character of himself. Obedience to the law, which they alone publish, is the only virtue; the only voluntary conformity to the will of God; the only foundation of praise and reward.

But truth and virtue cannot be loved too intensely; neither can be so highly regarded as its worth demands. All men esteem and love these divine objects incomparably less than they merit. In the estimation and affection of glorified beings, their excellence will rise higher and higher, and their lustre become more bright, beautiful, and lovely, throughout all eternity. It is impossible for a created being to regard them so highly as their importance deserves. The martyr, who expired on the rack, or perished in the flames, for his attachment to these inestimable objects, gave to their worth the highest testimony in his power. But even his testimony was faint and languid, compared with their inherent glory and beauty. Should the truth of this assertion be questioned, let it be

remembered, that the Son of God became incarnate, and died on the cross, to restore the love of truth, and the exercise of virtue, to the soul of man.

Thus the argument on which this scheme is built is itself founded on a gross and miserable falsehood; and a proof of lamentable ignorance concerning the subject in question. Who can estimate truth too highly, when he remembers, that it is the basis and the support of the divine kingdom; or virtue, when he perceives, that it is the object of boundless complacency, and eternal reward; when he remembers especially, that truth and virtue are the beauty and glory of Jehovah?

8. *God has expressly commanded men thus to educate their children.*

The foolishness of God is wiser than men. The objector here attributes foolishness to God; but it is easily seen, that his own arrogated wisdom terminates only in folly; that his scheme is idle and ruinous; and that the argument on which it professedly rests is a mere falsehood. Such, in the end, are, to the eye of sober investigation, all the devices of that vain, deceitful philosophy, which men so proudly exalt in opposition to divine wisdom.

But were we unable to detect either the folly or the mischief of this scheme; or to evince, by arguments of our own, the wisdom of the divine command; still every Christian would find his doubts satisfied, and his duty clear, in the command itself. *Thus saith the Lord,* is to him a pole-star, an infallible guide, over the ocean of doubt. To know, that any thing is the will of God is enough. He obeys; and asks no reasons to prove his obedience wise and safe. Would he even preserve the character of consistency, he cannot fail to perform this duty. Religion he esteems infinitely important to himself: can he fail to teach it to his children, that they also may share in so vast a blessing?

Were he to omit this duty, he would sacrifice his children: for he would lose the best opportunity of doing them the greatest good which is ever to be in his power. But to omit it wholly would be impossible, unless he should cease to live like a religious man. All his religious conduct would teach with commanding efficacy the very truths

which his voice denied. They would unceasingly behold religion in all the duties of his life: they would hear it every morning and every evening in his family devotions.

REMARKS.

From these observations it is evident,

1. *That the scheme of education against which I have contended is false, vain, and mischievous.*

It is *false*, because the argument by which it is supported is false; because the opinions which accompany it are erroneous; and because the views with which it is professedly supported are hypocritical. This is clear from the conduct of those who defend it; since that is directly contradictory to the scheme itself, and to the reasons alleged in its defence. It is *vain*, because, instead of accomplishing the purpose intended, it would effectuate the contrary purpose. Instead of increasing candour, and producing investigation, it would only prevent investigation, and advance prejudice. It is *mischievous*, because it would prevent children from knowing and embracing truth in the highest of all concerns; their duty and salvation; and would lead them only to ignorance, error, and iniquity.

Indeed, all this is so obvious, and so certain, that I hesitate not to pronounce those who propose it, whenever they are men of understanding, wholly insincere in the proposal. It is, I think, impossible, that they should be so blind to such obvious truth, as for a moment to imagine the education which they urge to be consistent with reason and common sense. On the contrary, it may, without any want of candour, be asserted, that their design is of a very different nature. Instead of aiming at the promotion of candour in children, they unquestionably intend to persuade men to educate their children in ignorance of the Scriptures, in an habitual disregard to them, and ultimately in a confirmed hatred of their precepts. They are sagacious enough to discern, that all persons are best fitted to receive religious impressions in childhood; and that, if they are suffered to grow up without them, they will either never receive them, or receive them with excessive difficulty. By prescribing and urging this mode of education they expect to see children habituated to irreligion, and con-

firmed without argument or conviction in infidelity. In this manner, far more easily and surely than in all others, they hope to exterminate religion from the world.

Of all these observations complete proof is furnished by the conduct of modern infidels. In defiance of this very scheme, they have laboured, with immense industry and art, to possess themselves of the education of children, throughout France, Germany, and other countries of Europe. Nor have they laboured without success. Distinguished infidels have extensively become instructors of those who were born to wealth and greatness; and men, corrupted by themselves, have still more extensively taught the mass of mankind. All these they have trained up to the principles of infidelity, and to the unlimited practice of vice. The mind, almost from its infancy, they have debauched by sentiments and images of pollution; withdrawn it from duty, from God, and from heaven, by fraud and falsehood; and allured it to sin and to hell, by art and ingenuity, by sophistry and entanglement, by insidious temptation and impudent example. With a smooth, soft, and lubricous progress, they have crept into the bosoms of the rising generation; and pierced them to the soul with fangs of poison. A general dissolution of health, a hopeless decay of the vital energy, has followed the incision. The bloom of life has vanished; a livid hue overspread the frame, and every harbinger of death hastened to announce the speedy dissolution.

Here no anxiety has been even pretended concerning the preoccupancy of the early mind, or the prevention of future candour. No succeeding investigation has been even hinted; and no intentional discussion of the great question proposed. Such fairness indeed was not to be expected from such men. Their only object has ever been to destroy the Bible, truth, and virtue; and to the nature of all means, provided they will accomplish the end, they are perfectly indifferent. The man who is deceived by such a scheme, supported by such arguments, and recommended by such men, must be a dupe of choice; a gudgeon, caught even without a hook.

2. *From these observations it is also evident, that the*

religious education of children is a high and indispensable duty.

In the text, and in many other passages of Scripture, it is solemnly commanded by God. If the considerations suggested throughout this discourse are just, it is powerfully enforced by reason. Our children are *bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh;* endeared to us by a thousand ties, and a thousand delightful offices. All their interests are ours; and often nearer to our hearts than our own. They are committed to us in solemn charge by our Maker; to be educated by us for his service and kingdom. He has made all things, in *their* situation and *ours*, conspire to this great end. Their helpless state calls for the habitual care and watchfulness, the uniform kindness and control, of their parents. Their minds, unoccupied by falsehood, are easily susceptible of truth, and fitted to receive and retain every useful impression. If the best impressions are not made, the worst will be; and parents are the only friends from whom may rationally be expected the communication of good, or the prevention of evil. If this duty be not early done, they may die before it is done, and their souls be lost. If they live, we waste the golden season of doing them eternal good.

Who, that is not dead to conscience, to humanity, and even to instinct, can thus act the ostrich, and leave his little ones to be crushed by every foot? Think of the awful account to be given, of wrapping this talent in a napkin, and burying it in the earth. Think of the infinite difference between ascending with them to heaven, and accompanying them down to the regions of perdition. Think of the reflections which must arise in their minds and ours throughout eternity, when their ruin shall be seen to have sprung from our neglect.

Nor is this duty incumbent on parents only. Every instructor is bound indispensably to second their endeavours where they are faithful, and to supply as far as may be the defect where they are not. Education ought every where to be *religious education*. The master is as truly bound to educate his apprentice or his servant in religion, and the schoolmaster his pupil, as the parent his child. In the degree of obligation, and of sin in violating it, there may per-

haps be a difference. In the nature of it there is none. The command is, *Train up a child in the way he should go;* directing all who are intrusted with the care of children, to educate them in this manner.

At the same time, parents are farther bound to employ no instructors who will not educate their children religiously. To commit our children to the care of irreligious persons, is to commit lambs to the superintendency of wolves. No sober man can lay his hand on his breast, when he has placed his child under the guidance of an irreligious teacher, and say, that he has done his duty; or feel himself innocent of the blood of his child. No man will be able, without confusion of face, to recount this part of his conduct before the bar of the final Judge.

SERMON CXLVIII.

THE ORDINARY MEANS OF GRACE.

THE MANNER IN WHICH RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IS TO BE CONDUCTED. MOTIVES TO THIS DUTY.

Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old he will not depart from it.—PROV. XXII. 6.

IN the last discourse I considered *the duty of educating children religiously.* In this I propose,

II. *To point out the manner, in which religious education should be conducted; and,*

III. *To exhibit some of the motives to the performance of this duty suggested by the promise in the text.*

The terms in which the command in the text is communicated teach us, as I have *heretofore observed,* that *children in their education are to be drawn from one action and attainment to another, by persuasion, promises, and other efforts, continually repeated.* Under the general meaning of

this phraseology, may be easily included, whatever I shall think it necessary to observe concerning this subject at the present time.

Some of the observations formerly made concerning the *general* education of children, will be applied here to their *religious* education. So important a subject deserves to be presented in a full light. No interesting, useful adjunct ought to be forgotten by the mind, while employed in the consideration of a duty which holds so high a rank. So far as the narrow limits, necessarily assigned to it in such a system of discourses, will allow, I shall endeavour to omit nothing which is of peculiar weight.

1. *Religious education should be begun in the dawn of childhood.*

The earliest days, after intelligence is fairly formed in the mind, are incomparably the best for this purpose. The child should be taught, as soon as he is capable of understanding the instructions which are to be communicated. Nothing should be suffered to preoccupy the place which is destined to truth. If the intellect is not filled with sound instruction as fast as it is capable of receiving it, *the enemy*, who never neglects to *sow tares* when parents are *asleep*, will imperceptibly fill it with a dangerous and noxious growth. The great and plain doctrines of religion should be taught so early, that the mind should never remember when it began to learn, or when it was without this knowledge. Whenever it turns a retrospective view upon the preceding periods of its existence, these truths should seem always to have been in its possession; to have the character of innate principles; to have been inwoven in its nature; and to constitute a part of all its current of thinking.

In this manner, the best security which is in the power of man will be furnished against the introduction and admission of dangerous errors. The principles of infidelity have little support in argument or evidence: but they easily take deep root in the inclinations of the mind; and hold but too frequently a secure possession of its faith by the aid of passion and prejudice. No human method of preventing this evil is so effectual, as engrossing the assent to evangelical truth, when the mind is absolutely clear

from every prepossession. A faith thus established, all the power of sophistry will be unable to shake. In the same manner ought its religious impressions to be begun. No period should be within the future reach of the memory, when they had not begun. Every child easily imbibes, at this period, a strong and solemn reverence for his Creator; easily realizes his universal presence, and the inspection of his all-seeing eye; admits without difficulty, and without reluctance, that he is an awful and unchangeable enemy of sin; and feels, that he himself is accountable to this great being for all his conduct. The conscience also is at this period exceedingly tender and susceptible; readily alarmed by the apprehension of guilt; and prepared to contend, or to fly, at the approach of a known temptation. All the affections also are easily moved; and fitted to retain permanently, and often indelibly, whatever impressions are made. The heart is soft, gentle, and easily won; strongly attached by kindness, peculiarly to the parents themselves, and generally to all others with whom it is connected. To every amiable, every good thing, it is drawn comparatively without trouble or resistance; and united by bands which no future art nor force can dissolve. Against every odious and bad thing its opposition is with equal ease excited, and rendered permanent. Its sensibility to praise for laudable actions is exquisite; and no less exquisite its dread of Blame, for conduct which is unworthy. Its hope also of future enjoyment, and its fear of future suffering, are awakened in a moment, without labour, by obvious considerations, and with a strength which renders them powerful springs of action.

This susceptibility, this tenderness of heart and of conscience, constitute a most interesting, desirable, and useful preparation of the mind to receive evangelical truths, and religious impressions; and invest it with all the beauty and fertility of spring. Almost every thing, which the eye discerns, is then fair, delightful, and promising. Let no person, to whom God has committed the useful, honourable, and happy employment of cultivating minds, be idle at this auspicious season. On faithful, wise, and well-directed labours, busily employed at this period of the human year,

the mildest winds of heaven breathe; its most fertilizing showers descend; and its softest and most propitious sunshine sheds its happy influence. He who loses this golden season, will, when the autumn arrives, find nothing in his fields but barrenness and death.

Nor is this period less happily fitted for the establishment of useful moral habits. Habits, as has been heretofore observed, are the result of custom or repetition; and may in this manner be formed at any age. But in early childhood the susceptibility is so great, and the feelings so tender, that a few repetitions will generate habitual feeling. Every impression at this period is deep. When these therefore are made through a moderate succession, the combined effect can rarely be effaced. Thus good habits are soon and durably established, and all that course of trouble prevented, of which parents so justly and bitterly complain, when this work is to be done at future seasons of life.

But habits constitute the man. Good habits form a good man, and evil habits an evil man. Subtract these from the character, and it will be difficult to conceive what will be left. It is plain, therefore, that habits are of supreme importance to the well-being of the child, his character, his all. Of course, the establishment of those which are good, is the first object of parental duty.

2. *Religious education should be continued with steadiness and uniformity.*

In the whole employment of educating a child, steadiness of character in the parent is indispensable to success. The parent, as was formerly observed, should be decisively seen always to approve and love the same things; and always to disapprove and hate such as are opposed to them. A settled purpose should be continually discovered in the conduct of the parent with regard to this great concern; a purpose to fix in the mind of the child just views and principles of religion, and dispositions really and evangelically virtuous. From this purpose nothing should appear to divert his attention, or withdraw his efforts. The religious education of his child should evidently appear to be a commanding business of his life; not a casual or occasional employment. A changing, vibratory character in the parent will prove

him to be either unstable, or not in earnest. No attribute, which is not obviously vicious, is perhaps more unhappily found in the parental character.

The parent who exhibits a steady, firm, unalterable disposition, will naturally be believed by his children to love religion as he ought; to make it the chief business of his life; to be deeply engaged in rendering *them* religious; and in all his instructions to mean whatever he says. The whole weight of his character will therefore accompany his precepts; and enforce them in the most efficacious manner upon the minds of his children.

To convince the child of this character in the parent, *uniformity* is of the last moment. Whatever is pursued at times only, and in a desultory manner, children will never believe to be a serious object in the view of the parent. Whatever is sometimes exhibited in the light of importance, and at others in that of unconcern, will only awaken doubt, and ultimately produce indifference. Important objects, it is well known, always wear this character in the view of him who regards them as important; and are therefore felt and exhibited in one, and that a serious, manner. So plainly and so entirely is this the fact, that children, as easily as men, discover at once the true place which any thing holds in the estimation of those around them, by the uniformity or the inconstancy with which they attend to it; and by the seriousness or levity with which it is accompanied in their communications. That, and that only, which is taught every day, or on every proper occasion, and which is always taught seriously and earnestly, is ever believed by the pupil to hold a place of high importance in the mind of the instructor. On the contrary, whatever is taught occasionally only, with levity or with indifference; or taught in a manner, now grave, now light, sometimes earnestly, and sometimes with negligence, regularly at one period, and with long intermissions at another; can scarcely be supposed to be of any great significance in the view of the teacher. This language of nature can be misunderstood by none. The earliest and the weakest mind perceives it in a moment, as well as the oldest and the wisest. If then parents wish to make deep and solemn impressions on their

children, let them remember, that uniformity in their instructions is indispensable to this end.

Besides, uniformity in teaching is absolutely necessary to the establishment of habit, both in thinking and feeling. If instructions succeed each other after considerable intervals, or are given with a diversity of feelings on the part of the instructor, one truth and one impression will in a degree be worn out before another is introduced. In the mean time, others of a different, and often of a contrary, nature will be imbibed. Thus the work, like the web of Penelope, will be woven at one period only to be destroyed at another. In this way the parent will find his task always discouraging, and often fruitless.

It ought to be remembered, that uniformity should extend to every thing which concerns this subject. The instructions, the spirit with which they are enforced, nay, the very deportment of the instructor, as well as the control, example, and life, should always wear one consistent appearance of solemnity, earnestness, and entire conviction.

3. *In a religious education the Scriptures only should be taught.*

The youngest mind which can perceive moral truth at all, clearly discerns that no doctrines can be invested with an importance comparable to that of the doctrines taught by God. The character of this great and awful being is seen by the humblest intelligent creature to be immeasurably distant from every other. This distinction, of supreme consequence in itself, should be preserved in its full force by the parent, throughout all his instructions. Religious truth, that is, whatever is an obligatory object of faith, or rule of duty; whatever *pertains to life and to godliness;* is wholly and only taught by God. This great doctrine should be originally impressed on the early mind; and should afterward be never suffered to escape from its attention. Scriptural truths should for this reason be clearly distinguished at every period, as the unquestioned word of God, and come to the child with the sanction of divine authority. In this method the child will imbibe a reverence for these truths entirely peculiar; and if no human opinions should be mingled with them in the instruction, will carry it through

life. A little mixture of philosophy however will in a great measure prevent this desirable effect; and imperceptibly lower the Scriptures from their supreme dignity and inestimable importance, down to the humble level of mere human opinion.

4. *Such parts of the Scriptures only should be taught at any time, as may be made distinctly intelligible to the mind of the pupil.*

The plainest things are universally the most important. God in his infinite wisdom has in this respect mercifully brought the means of religious knowledge, our duty, and our salvation, within the reach of the young and the ignorant, who always constitute the great body of mankind, and are equally interested in them with the experienced and the knowing. The most important things are thus placed in the power of children.

At the same time it is evident, that these are the *only* things which are within their power. The instructor who attempts to teach them either doctrines or precepts, more obscure or more complicated; or who mixes any extraneous instruction with that which is obvious; will only perplex, and ultimately confound, the understanding of his pupil; will cloud all his views; and destroy his relish for learning.

Nor should *the manner of teaching* be less plain and intelligible than the doctrines which are taught. In teaching children, there should be no display of learning; no extensive or profound investigations; no introduction of things which are foreign to the subject in hand. The simplest language, the fewest and plainest words, and the most familiar illustrations only, should be adopted; and the whole force of the instructions, and the whole attention of the child, should as much as possible be confined to the doctrines themselves. For all superior discoveries, for objections and their answers, for the connexion and dependance of the truths which are taught, and for the proofs of their reasonableness and utility, the child should be referred to future opportunities, and the vigour of riper years.

5. *The disposition discovered and felt by the instructor, should always be that of tender affection.*

No instructions are ever advantageously imbibed by chil-

dren, except from those whom they love; and they love none except those by whom they think themselves beloved. The real air, aspect, and proof, of affection, are as discernible by a child as by a man, and his real friends as easily known. No persons feel affection more tenderly, or more carefully watch the conduct in which it is discovered. But the only way to appear kind is to feel kindly; and the only way to be believed to have this character, is to possess it.

It is not easy to estimate the importance of the *manner* in this employment. The instructions of an unkind teacher are hated of course; of a cunning one suspected; of an uninterested one received with listless indifference. On the contrary the affectionate instructor is viewed by his pupil as a beloved friend. No employment invests man with more amiableness than well-directed instruction; especially when the pupil is a little child. From such a friend every thing is received, retained, and obeyed, with reverence and delight. By a teacher of this character more good can often be done in a day, than by a disgusting one in a life.

6. *Religion should always be exhibited in a solemn and pleasing, and never in a gloomy and discouraging light.*

There are persons usually very ignorant, and frequently of a melancholy cast, who seem to suppose themselves and others required to be always of a sorrowful and downcast demeanour. The only religious duties which appear to arrest their attention, are those which belong to self-mortification. Between the licentious gaiety of loose men, and the serene cheerfulness of religion, they make, and are apparently willing to make, no distinction. A smile they mistake for an expression of unwarrantable levity; and the grateful, cheerful lives of their fellow-Christians, they construe into mere courses of worldly ease and sinful security. Of these persons some are undoubtedly self-deceivers; some are gross hypocrites; especially those who make great pretensions to sanctity, and much bustle about their religious attainments. Others of them also are unquestionably Christians. Those of this class are all persuaded that their views of religion are just; and both from a sense of duty, and the exercise of affection, feel themselves obliged to communicate them to their children. What they teach

they exemplify. Accordingly both the instructions and the examples are only gloomy and awful; and are regarded by their children only with dislike and dread. From the mere force of nature the teacher may be loved, and his instructions reverenced; but both will still be met and listened to, only with pain and disgust. Both the precepts, and the religion which they inculcate, will be dreaded beforehand, and disrelished afterward. A release from them will be regarded as an escape. No useful impressions can be made by them, no desirable conduct effected. Children, thus taught, usually dislike religion even more than those who are not taught at all. A moderate share of common sense must, one would think, banish for ever this disastrous mode of instruction.

It is far from being my intention to deny, that there are painful considerations connected with religion. One of its employments is to form just views of sin; and another to regard it with suitable emotions. *Sin* is always a painful subject of contemplation. Nor is *repentance* without its mixture of pain. *Self-denial* also is at many times, and in various respects, a source of serious suffering. But sin itself is no part of religion, and the anguish of repentance is, in the beautiful language of Mrs. Steele, *a painful, pleasing anguish;* incomparably more desirable than the sinner's hardness of heart. There is something so pleasant, so sweet, so congenial to the proper taste of a rational being, in ingenuous sorrow for sin, an honest confession of it to our heavenly Father, cordial resistance to temptation, and faithful resolutions of new obedience; in victory over our lusts; in a consciousness of evangelical worth; in the conviction that we have glorified our Creator; and in an humble hope of his approbation; all involved in the exercise of repentance; as to render this affection of the heart too welcome to the penitent ever to be deliberately exchanged by him for the gratifications of sin. The same enjoyments also accompany Christian self-denial too obviously to demand proof; and to every mind controlled by religion, render it universally agreeable, and frequently delightful. What then shall be said of the Christian's faith, and love, and peace, and hope, and joy; all of them other names for refined and elevated pleasure? Look into the writings

of David and Paul, and learn from their own expressions how Christianity can allay the storms of trouble, and gild the gloom of a sorrowful life with serenity and sunshine.

If then religion itself is presented by an instructor with gloom and discouragement, it is falsely presented: truths may be taught, but they are exhibited in a false garb. With this garb they will always be associated in the mind of the pupil: and the whole effect will be misconception and error.

In this mode of instruction, children are kept at a distance from religion by a regular repulsion: and scarcely approach so near, as to learn its real nature. Even truth itself will to them be odious truth: religion will be hated and dreaded before it is known: and to receive instruction will be regarded as a mere and painful task. That which is taught the child will neither love, respect, nor remember: and the teacher's own example of its influence will complete the alienation which his precepts began.

Austerity in an instructor will produce substantially the same effects. Religion is in its nature, and by a child is regularly seen to be, eminently solemn, and in some respects awful. At the same time, it is serene, cheerful, and lovely; the source of the purest peace, the most solid consolation and the most refined joy. Its *whole* character ought to be set before the child. Let its solemnity awe; let its cheerful and delightful aspect inspire hope, and engage affection. Escape from evil, and the attainment of good, are the only motives by which a rational being can be influenced at all. Both these, therefore, should be placed in the view of the child. St. Paul has thought proper to urge our obedience to the law by the consideration, that it is *good*, as well as *just*, and *holy*; and to recommend our duty by the argument, that it *is our reasonable service*. Every Christian, in the education of his children, is bound to follow the example of this great instructor.

7. *Religious education ought to be enforced by the government, example, and prayers, of the teacher.*

Government is the great means by which the authority of the parent is preserved, and the obedience of the child kept alive. It is also the great means of communicating to the child lasting and influential impressions, and of preparing

him cheerfully and affectionately to receive the truths which he is taught. Sound government perfectly harmonizes with sound instruction. No character is so highly regarded by man, as that which is displayed in wise, just, and benevolent control. Government also presents every instruction in the form of law, and all conduct in the solemn guise of duty; enjoins obedience with authority, and enforces its injunctions with penalties and rewards.

A child well governed loves his parent of course. From the parent his affection is easily transferred to his precepts. He is prepared to obey, as well as to listen; and desirous to please his instructor, as well as to profit himself. An ungoverned child, on the contrary, will neither listen nor regard, neither obey nor profit. His only disposition, his only design, will be to neglect whatever is taught, and oppose whatever is enjoined. The former he will despise: against the latter he will rebel. Two children of these contrary characters can hardly be compared. The one will learn, and do every thing; the other nothing.

What government thus happily begins, example confirms. The teacher who does not live agreeably to his own instructions, will never be supposed to love, nor even to believe, what he enjoins. All his labours will therefore be attributed to sinister views; to the pursuit of his own convenience; and not to the love either of religion or his pupil. Instructions thus regarded will never be welcomed to the heart, and rarely to the understanding. He on the contrary whose life is governed by the same rules which he prescribes to his child, will always be considered; as proving his own sincerity; as teaching what he believes, and enjoining what he loves. The precepts of such an instructor are rarely disrelished, and never doubted.

All our instructions however, like our other efforts, are in vain without the blessing of God. This blessing, to be obtained, must be asked. Prayer for the success of our instructions should accompany them of course. The child should be a witness of the parent's supplication to God for him; and should be taught to supplicate for himself. All the duties of religion are eminently solemn and venerable in the eyes of children. But none will so strongly prove the sincerity of the parent; none so powerfully awaken the

reverence of the child; none so happily recommend the instruction which he receives; as family devotions, peculiarly those in which petitions for the children occupy a distinguished place.

At the same time, God will actually bless those who seek his blessing. But where it is not sought, it will not be given; and where it is not given, our best exertions will be in vain. *Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it.*

III. *I shall now exhibit some of the motives to the performance of this duty suggested by the promise in the text.*

Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it.

This promise has been differently construed by different commentators. Some have supposed it to be an absolute promise; declaring, that in every instance in which a child is thus educated, he will persevere *in the way he should go.* Others have supposed it to declare merely the usual result of such education. The former class say, that every instance of failure on the part of children, is owing to a want of faithfulness on the part of the parents. They add, that if parents were perfectly faithful in this duty, their children would never come short of eternal life. With this construction I cannot agree, for two reasons.

First. *The Scriptures abound in such absolute declarations, which are not and cannot be understood in this absolute manner.* Thus it is said, that *neither drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.* Yet some men, of all these classes, unquestionably become penitent; and by the reformation of their lives prove themselves to be Christians. Should it be said, that sinners, of these several characters, who leave the world without repentance, will *not inherit the kingdom of God*; and that this is what is intended: I answer, "The declaration would undoubtedly be true; but would, I think, be nugatory; because it would be equally true of all other sinners."

Secondly. *According to this construction there would be nothing declared.* No person ever educated his child with perfect faithfulness. On this ground, therefore, no child would persevere in this desirable way. Of course, the pro-

mise, considered in a practical light, would be nothing to mankind.

If these observations are just, it will, I suppose, be admitted without difficulty, that *God intended this promise as a direct encouragement to parents who should be faithful in such a degree as we sometimes see exercised in the education of children.* The amount of the promise to these parents is, I apprehend, *that their children will generally, when trained up in the way they should go, not depart from it.* This, as it appears to me, has also been the course of providential dispensations.

To this declaration, however, it probably will be, as it often has been, objected, that *the course of Providence here alleged is against the promise; and that it is contradicted by plain facts.* "The children," it has been often said, "of religious parents, the children particularly of clergymen, who, if any, must be supposed to be religiously educated, exhibit as few proofs of a virtuous character, and as many proofs of a sinful one, as the children of other men." Nay, it has been said, I have frequently heard it said, that "the children of professing Christians, and particularly of ministers, are less virtuous, and more distinguished for profligacy, than other children." These observations are not always made with an intention to utter slander, and with a conviction that they are false. They are sometimes uttered by sober men. Nay, they are sometimes countenanced by Christians, and even by ministers; especially in the indulgence of zeal against the doctrine, *that there are means of grace.* I have heard it asserted, and apparently with some feelings of victory, that in a given case or cases, persons, who have not been religiously educated, had become subjects of piety, in as great and greater numbers, than those who had received such an education. That many persons who have not been religiously educated are sanctified, is undoubtedly true. That their number is proportionally so great as is here indicated, will be affirmed only by the *zeal* which is *not according to knowledge.* Let any man read *the history of the revivals of religion;* and he will need no farther arguments on this point. Still, as this doctrine has spread so far, and assumed so serious an aspect, I shall now make a few brief remarks concerning the subject.

First. *All professors of religion, and all ministers, are not Christians.* From those who are of this character, the religious education of their children cannot be expected.

Secondly. *Some who are Christians perform this duty very imperfectly.* Men of both these classes are not unfrequently too much engrossed by other concerns. Professors are sometimes so deeply engaged in their business, and ministers by their studies, as to neglect this and many other duties. Some of them also are negligent, through a characteristical easiness and carelessness of temper. Some are injudicious; and pursue ill-devised plans. Some are of a changeable disposition; and undo to-day, partially at least, what they did yesterday. From these and other causes of the like nature, the manner in which they educate their children is very imperfect. Of this imperfection the consequences will be experienced of course.

Thirdly. *Some Christians govern their children unhappily.* They are passionate; and govern with fickleness and violence. They are indulgent; and scarcely govern them at all. They are austere, or gloomy; and thus discourage and disgust their children; insensibly alienating their minds both from their instructions and themselves.

Fourthly. *One of the parents is sometimes irreligious; and thwarts the labours of the other.*

Fifthly. *Some Christian parents,* though it is believed this number is small, *do not pray in their families; and in this manner fail of receiving blessings upon themselves, and upon their children.*

Sixthly. *The children of Christian parents,* for various reasons, *are often educated chiefly by others, who are incompetent, or unfaithful.*

Seventhly. *The children of Christian parents are not unfrequently corrupted by evil companions; and that perhaps during the best education.*

Eighthly. *Christian churches extensively neglect the discipline which they ought to administer both to the parents and the children, when negligent of their respective duties.* By this neglect the spirit of educating children religiously has been suffered to languish; and the obligations to this duty have ceased to be felt as its importance demands.

These remarks will, if I mistake not, sufficiently explain

the real state of facts, so far as to shew, that they are consistent with the promise, as it has been interpreted above.

But the truth is, *the assertion itself is substantially false.* That there are children of religious parents, who are themselves destitute of religion through life; that the whole number of these is considerable; will not be questioned. Who, after what has been said, could rationally expect it to be otherwise? That some of these are profligates, and some even remarkable for their profligacy, I shall not deny. Those who have broken through peculiar restraints, and sinned against powerful motives, are usually abandoned sinners. Accordingly Dr. Young says forcibly, and justly, though solecistically,

"A shameless woman is the worst of men."

But notwithstanding these exceptions, the great body of Christians is made up of those who have been religiously educated; imperfect as this education has been. Every sober man may perceive this truth by his own observation. It is true of this seminary: it is true of this country: it is true of every other Christian country: it has been always true. A striking proof of it is furnished here, by the character and offices which the sons of clergymen have holden in New-England, ever since it was settled by our ancestors. A complete proof of it every where is furnished by the *history of revivals of religion.* Every contradictory instance, it is to be remembered, is regarded *with surprise;* a fact which could not exist if the declension were common; and is made, very improperly, a representative of multitudes. Nor ought it to be forgotten, that when members of *irreligious families* become pious, surprise is equally excited.

Having now, as I hope, removed all the objections which might be supposed to attend this subject, I proceed to remark,

1. *That by a religious education of their children, parents, more easily and more perfectly than is possible in any other manner, will render them dutiful, harmonious, and happy, in the present world.*

A family religiously educated will, in a good degree, be-

come orderly and dutiful of course. The doctrines and sentiments which they are taught, and habitually imbibe; the conduct to which they are formed; the examples which they daily behold; the motives steadily presented to their view; and the worship to which they are daily summoned; all conspire with supreme force to call up every thought, affection, and action, which constitutes a part of their duty. Their minds are wrought into a character, a course of action, widely different from that of other children. This difference even a stranger cannot fail to discern at once. Among those who are charged with the instruction of youth, it has long since become the subject of proverbial remark.

All the tendencies of religion are dutiful tendencies; and are therefore peaceful and pleasing. Harmony of minds, and harmony of purposes, cannot without this aid be produced for any length of time, or any extent of operation. Unity of conduct may indeed be effectuated, to a considerable extent, by the rod of power; but not unity of affection, or design. Constrained union can never be the source of happiness to any collection of rational beings; and will peculiarly fail of producing happiness in a family. To repress the native selfishness of the heart, means of some kind or other are indispensable. Nothing has hitherto effectually accomplished this purpose but religion. Even the mere, fixed belief of its truths and duties, and of accountableness to God, will go far towards overcoming the open indulgences of passion and appetite. A cordial reception of these truths and duties will finally vanquish them all. Religious education, then, is the road to the religion of a family; and that religion is the road to a domestic happiness.

As happiness in this world is chiefly enjoyed in the family, and under God, supremely dependant on domestic peace; the religious education of Children becomes plainly the chief means of the first earthly good. A glorious motive is here held out, to induce us to educate our children religiously.

2. *Children thus educated will persevere also in the way to eternal life.*

This I consider as the main subject of the promise in the text. In the sense in which I have explained it, it has, I

apprehend, been universally verified. Of this truth, the proof already alleged is presumed to be sufficient.

The parent must be an unnatural wretch by whom this motive is not deeply felt. The salvation of his child is promised to him, and in the most endearing of all methods; *viz.* as *the consequence of his labour.* He who is not a barbarian, or a brute, must wish his children to be happy, favoured of God, and beloved by his own companions, throughout eternity. To the heart of him who knows the tenderness of nature, this desire must come home with supreme and unmingled power. The very thought of presenting one's children to the Judge, at his right hand, on the final day, and of being able to say, *Behold here am I, and the children whom thou hast given me,* is a thought of ecstacy, which bewilders the heart with joy. Let no parent who is not compelled by this consideration to a duty, so delightful in itself, pretend to love his children at all.

If we *train up* our children *in the way* they *should go,* they will enter it almost of course; follow us to heaven, and be our companions for ever. There they will be everlasting witnesses of our tender affection to them, and our faithful care of their souls, while we were both in the present world. At their dying bed, if we survive them; on our dying bed, if they survive us; we shall be saved also from the distressing reflection, that through our negligence they had been lost, and are destined to sin and suffer for ever.

3. *In this manner parents perform their prime duty.*

The great end of our being is the performance of our duty. In this God intends, that we should find our happiness, and *that* a greater happiness than we can otherwise attain. All parts of our duty are plainly to be regarded according to their importance. To parents, that which is enjoined in the text is primarily important. On their children they can usually have more and better influence than they can possibly have on others. In a high and endearing sense, they are their property; are united to them by the tenderest ties; are ever in their presence; and regard them with singular reverence and affection. From all these sources parents derive the power of making more, deeper, and happier, impressions, than others can make, or than they can make on others. This power God has re-

quired all parents faithfully to exert; and in religious education alone is it faithfully exerted. To perform this duty is, therefore, the chief end for which we are made parents; the chief good which men are usually able to do; the chief means of glorifying our Creator. If then we wish to please God, to enjoy the greatest happiness in this world, or to carry our children with us to heaven, and enjoy their company for ever; we shall not fail, with deep solicitude watchful care, and unshaken constancy, to *train them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.*

SERMON CXLIX.

THE EXTRAORDINARY MEANS OF GRACE.

THE CHARACTER OF MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH.

Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers.—2 COR. VI. 14.

IN the last discourse I finished the observations which I have thought it necessary to make concerning *the ordinary means of grace.* In the several discourses on this subject, I have endeavoured to shew, that *there are means of grace; what they are; and what is their influence; and to answer the objections usually made against this scheme of doctrine.* I then *severally considered each of these means* at some length; and *gave such directions concerning the use of them, such explanations of their efficacy, and such answers to objections against them, severally,* as this system of discourses appeared to require.

The next subject in order is

Those means of grace which are of limited application: viz. *baptism; the Lord's supper; and the communion of Christians.*

But, before I enter upon the immediate discussion of these subjects, it will be necessary to consider *the cha-*

racter and circumstances of those by whom these means of grace are to be used; viz. *that collection of persons which is denominated the church of Christ.* In examining this interesting subject, I shall

Describe the church of Christ, as exhibited in the Scriptures; and then

Explain the nature of its peculiar ordinances and employments.

The church of Christ is composed of its ordinary members and its officers. In the present discourse, I shall attempt to exhibit *the character of its ordinary members,* as presented to us in the Scriptures.

To this subject we are naturally led by the text. *Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers.* The word here translated *unequally yoked,* is in the Greek, ἑτεροζυγουντες, and denotes, literally, *being yoked to those of a different kind;* and here means *being yoked unfitly, or improperly.* Concerning the communion here forbidden there have been various opinions.

First. *It has been frequently supposed to be marriage.*

That this is not a just interpretation is evident, because there is not, before or afterward, a syllable said concerning this subject; and because the direction, given in the seventeenth verse of the context, concerning the communion here specified, would, if marriage were intended, contradict the precept given by the apostle, 1 Cor. vii. 12, 13. *Here* the direction is, *Wherefore come ye out from among them, and be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you.* The precept *there* is, *If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away. And the woman that hath a husband that believeth not, if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him.*

Secondly. *It has been supposed also to mean common social intercourse with mankind, whether more or less intimate.*

This, I think, cannot be the meaning; because the direction above mentioned would then contradict the declarations of the apostle in 1 Cor. v. 9, 10. *I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators. Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covet-*

ous, or extortioners, or with idolaters: for then ye must needs go out of the world.

Thirdly. *It has been supposed also to be religious communion with the worshippers of idols.*

This indeed is undoubtedly forbidden; as being fairly included in the phraselogy of the text. The worshippers of idols are one class of unbelievers: but no reason can be given, why a particular class should be intended in the text, and not all other classes. The prohibition is general, without an exception. We are obliged to receive it as it is: and, since the apostle has not thought proper to limit it, we cannot warrantably annex a limitation.

That the communion here intended is *religious communion* I have not a doubt. *This* is forbidden with *unbelievers.* To illustrate the impropriety of religious communion with persons of this character, the questions following the text in the 14th and 15th verses are asked by the apostles. For this end only are they asked; as might easily be made evident by a particular comment, if the occasion would permit. I shall therefore consider the text as containing this doctrine:

That Christians are bound not to enter into religious communion with unbelievers: or, what is equivalent, the church of Christ ought to consist of Christians only.

The truth of this doctrine is strongly exhibited in the words themselves: particularly as they have been illustrated. The proper meaning can indeed be nothing else.

The same interpretation is also unanswerably evident, because,

First. *There are but three kinds of communion of which man is capable; marriage, social intercourse,* and *religious communion.* I have shewn, that the two first cannot be meant in this passage. The last therefore is meant.

Secondly. *That all unbelievers are intended in the text is evident,* because, in the 17th and 18th verses, God says, *Wherefore come ye out from among them, and be ye separate; and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a father to you; and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.*

These things, it will be remembered, were written to the Corinthian church. Of the members of this church it is

said, that if they will come out from among the persons with whom their communion was forbidden, and be separated from them, God will receive them, and be a father to them; and that they shall be his sons and daughters. But this promise could not be made to those who were not Christians, however decent, moral, and unobjectionable, they might be in their external deportment. The persons, to whom the text is addressed, were addressed as Christians only, because the promise cannot have been made to any others. But if this church had, in the apostle's view, been intentionally and scripturally made up of others beside Christians, the apostle could not have addressed them in language applicable only to Christians. The text therefore, in connexion with the context, furnishes clear evidence of the truth of the doctrine. As however it is a doctrine of great importance, and not a little debated even in the present age; I shall consider it more at length; and endeavour to illustrate it by the following considerations:

I. *The original formation of the church in the world:*

II. *The establishment and character of the Jewish church as exhibited in the Scriptures:*

III. *The nature of the covenant between God and the members of the church:*

IV. *The nature of Christian communion:*

V. *The nature of Christian discipline: and,*

VI. *The manner in which the Christian church is spoken of in the New Testament.*

These subjects, if I mistake not, involve every thing of importance in the concerns of the church. If then they all point the same way, and prove the same things, the consequence will, it is hoped, be a fair and scriptural determination of the point in debate. It will be expected, from a consideration of the limits beyond which the discussion cannot here proceed, that many things must be omitted which might be fairly demanded in a regular treatise. It will also be supposed, that whatever is said must be said in a summary manner. Having premised these things, I observe,

I. *This doctrine is illustrated by the original foundation of the church in the world.*

Of this event we have a summary account, Gen. iv. 26. *And to Seth, to him also there was born a son; and he called his name Enos: then began men to call upon the name of the Lord;* or, as in the margin, *to call themselves by the name of the Lord.* The meaning of this declaration is plainly, that *they took upon themselves the title of the sons of God; considering themselves as his children by adoption, in distinction from wicked men, who were children of God by creation only,* and had forfeited this relation by their apostasy. By this title they professed themselves to be penitents, believers, obedient; to have the disposition of children; and to reverence, love, and serve, God. As this title is adopted afterward by the divine writers throughout the Scriptures, it is fairly presumed to have been directed originally by God himself: for it is scarcely credible, that God would every where call his church by a name derived from mere human assumption.

I have observed, that this phraseology is ever afterward used to denote the church. The members of the church are called *sons of God* twelve times in the Scriptures; *his children* twice in the Old, and ten times in the New, Testament; and *his people* in instances too numerous to be reckoned. In all these instances *the sons* and *children* of God denote *those who are such by adoption;* and, in very many, the phrase, *the people of God,* has the same meaning. But the adopted children of God are Christians. The original church therefore consisted of Christians; or, in other words, those who were subjects of faith, repentance, and holiness. This is evident also from the fact, that *the holy angels are called the sons of God:* an application of the phrase which indicates, that holy beings only are designated by this title.

The same doctrine is also illustrated by *the ordinance of baptism.* In the administration of this ordinance, persons are *baptized* not *in,* but *into, the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:* that is, by his appointment *they are introduced into his family, and take his name upon them, as being his children.*

This title also was adopted at first, to distinguish those by whom it was adopted, from persons who were destitute of faith, repentance, and holiness; and therefore was a

direct profession of piety on the part of those by whom it was assumed.

II. *The doctrine is illustrated by the establishment and character of the Jewish church as exhibited in the Scriptures.*

The establishment of the Jewish church was not the formation of a new church, but a continuation of the original or patriarchal church, under a form in some respects new. Particularly, it was confined to a single family; that of Abraham; was furnished with a series of written revelations from the time of Moses; and had new sacraments instituted; viz. *circumcision* in the time of Abraham, and *the passover* in the days of Moses.

A new ritual was also given, at this latter period, for the universal direction of its worship; typifying, in a decisive manner, the mediation of Christ, and the worship of Christians. Agreeably to this scheme, the church was established on the same foundations as before. In the 17th of Genesis we have an account of this establishment, from the 4th verse to the end of the 14th. The amount of this covenant was plainly, *that God would be the God of Abraham and his seed;* as God himself explains this subject Ezek. xvi. 8; where, speaking of the Jewish nation as his church, he says, *I sware unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee; and thou becamest mine.* In accordance with this exhibition God directed Moses to say to Pharaoh, *Thus saith the Lord, Israel is my son, even my firstborn.*

The same thing is also evident from *the manner in which the Israelites renewed, and took upon themselves individually, the covenant made with Abraham.* Of this transaction we have an account in Deut. xxvi. 16, &c. *This day the Lord thy God hath commanded thee to do these statutes and judgments. Thou shalt therefore keep and do them with all thine heart, and with all thy soul. Thou hast avouched the Lord this day to be thy God, and to walk in his ways, and to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and to hearken unto his voice; and the Lord hath avouched thee this day to be his peculiar people, as he hath promised thee: and that thou shouldest keep all his com-*

mandments, and to make thee high above all nations which he hath made, in praise, and in name, and in honour: and that thou mayest be a holy people unto the Lord thy God, as he hath spoken.

Here it is manifest that the Israelites avouched, that is, publicly and solemnly declared, JEHOVAH to be their God, whom they chose as such; and whom as such they covenanted faithfully to obey in all his commandments, with all the heart, as a holy people. Equally evident is it that God avouched them to be his people; whom he had chosen to be a peculiar people to himself. Accordingly, on the one hand it was perpetually enjoined upon them, that *they should love the Lord their God with all the heart;* in which case he promised to keep his covenant with them (see Deut. vii. 9); and on the other he declared repeatedly, that he had chosen them to be a *special* and *peculiar people* unto himself. Deut. vii. 6, and xiv. 2.

The same thing is also evident from *God's express prohibition to the wicked, of taking his covenant into their mouths.* Ps. l. 16. *Unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldest take my covenant into thy mouth? Unto the wicked;* that is, to all included under this title, or to all wicked persons, God saith, that is, universally, as an expression of his will at all times.

This declaration was made immediately to the Israelites, to the wicked members of the Jewish church; and contains an absolute prohibition of this conduct on the part of sinful men. No national connexion therefore with a church, no descent from Abraham, gave a right to any wicked Israelite to take the covenant into his mouth. Although he had been circumcised, he was still abhorred in this transaction; and exposed himself in a peculiar degree to the anger of God.

Finally; The same thing is evident from the *manner in which God speaks of their sin in breaking his covenant.* In Lev. xxvi. 15, &c. God says, *If ye shall despise my statutes; or if your soul abhor my judgments, so that ye will not do all my commandments, but that ye break my covenant; I also will do this unto you. I will even appoint over you terror, consumption, and the burning ague, that shall con-*

sume the eyes, and cause sorrow of heart: and ye shall sow your seed in vain: for your enemies shall eat it. And I will set my face against you, &c. In Deut. xxix. 22, and onward, Moses says, *So that the generation to come of your children, and the stranger that shall come from a far land, shall say when they see the plagues of your land, and the sicknesses which the Lord hath laid upon it, and that the whole land thereof is brimstone, salt, and burning, like the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboim: even all the nations shall say, Wherefore hath the Lord done thus unto his land, and what meaneth the heat of this great anger? Then men shall say, Because they have forsaken the covenant of the Lord God of their fathers.* See also Jer. xxii. 8, 9. Ezek. xvi. 59. Hos. x. 4.

III. *This doctrine is illustrated also by the nature of the covenant between God and the members of the church.*

As there have been various opinions relative to this subject, it seems necessary that it should be considered with some particularity. I observe therefore,

1. *That the Israelites were required expressly to enter into an open, public covenant with God.*

Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name. Deut. vi. 13. *Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God: him shalt thou serve: to him shalt thou cleave, and swear by his name.* Deut. x. 20. *In that day shall five cities in the land of Egypt speak the language of Canaan, and swear to the Lord of Hosts.* Is. xix. 18. *And it shall come to pass, if they will diligently learn the ways of my people, to swear by my name, The Lord liveth (as they taught my people to swear by Baal); then shall they be built in the midst of my people.* Jer. xii. 16. *Them that worship the host of heaven upon the house-top, and them that worship and swear by the Lord, and that swear by Malcham.* Zeph. i. 5.

It is observed by president Edwards that the phrase, *Swear by the Lord,* ought to be rendered, *Swear to or unto the Lord;* and that the true meaning of the phrase is, *Ye shall enter into covenant with the Lord your God.* Accordingly the transaction already quoted from Deut. xxvi. 16, in which God avouched the Israelites to be his people, and

they avouched him to be their God, is styled both a *covenant* and an *oath*. *Ye stand this day, all of you, before the Lord your God,* says Moses to the whole people of Israel, *that thou shouldest enter into covenant with the Lord thy God, and into his oath which the Lord thy God maketh with thee this day; that he may establish thee to-day for a people unto himself, that he may be unto thee a God as he hath said unto thee, and as he hath sworn unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. Neither with you only do I make this covenant and this oath, but with him that standeth here with us this day before the Lord our God, and also of him who is not here with us this day.*

Of the transaction here recorded I observe,

First. *That it is styled both an oath and a covenant.*

Secondly. *That it was entered into by all the Israelites, both old and young,* and by *the strangers who were with them; and was made on the part of God with their posterity; him that is not here with us this day.*

Thirdly. *It was a covenant of the same tenor with that which God made with Abraham: That he might be unto thee a God, as he had sworn unto thy fathers, to Abraham,* &c.

Fourthly. *That the covenant or oath was the same with that recorded in Deut.* xxvi. JEHOVAH avouched them to be his people; and they avouched him to be their God.

Fifthly. *That it is the same covenant afterward prophesied of by Jeremiah* xxxi. *&c. and quoted by St. Paul, Heb.* viii. 8, *as the covenant of the Christian church; I will be to them a God; and they shall be to me a people.*

From these remarks it is plain, that *the oath* here sworn by all the people of Israel, was no other than a *religious covenant* between God and *them* as members of his church. Scarcely one in one thousand of these persons could have any lawful occasion for swearing in any other sense; and, at the time here specified, no such occasion existed to any individual: their whole business being merely to enter into this covenant with God.

As they are accused frequently of having broken this covenant in their succeeding generations; it is plain, that throughout those generations they entered into it in a similar manner. Several instances of this nature are particu-

larly recorded. A remarkable one is found in 2 Chron. xv. 12, &c. Here it is said of all Judah and Benjamin, and strangers from Israel, that *they entered into a covenant to seek the Lord God of their fathers with all their heart, and with all their soul.* Of this transaction it is said, *that they sware unto the Lord with a loud voice; and all Judah rejoiced at the oath: for they had sworn with all their heart, and sought him with their whole desire. The covenant* and *the oath* therefore were the same thing. It was also a service commanded; for it is subjoined, *And he was found of them:* that is, *he blessed them.* But God blesses men to whom he has made a revelation of his will, in no religious service which he hath not commanded. *In vain,* saith our Saviour (quoting from the prophet Isaiah), *do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.*

Another instance is alluded to in 2 Chron. xxix. 10.

Another is recorded in 2 Chron. xxiii. 16.

Another, 2 Chron. xxxiv. 31, 32.

In a word, the whole tenor of the Old Testament teaches us, that the Israelites were required publicly to enter into covenant with God in this manner; and that this covenant is styled indifferently *a covenant* and *an oath.* As therefore there is no hint of any other oath ever taken to God by this people as a nation; as there is no conceivable occasion upon which a whole nation can be supposed, throughout its successive generations, to enter into any other oath to God; it is plain that the precepts requiring them to swear to God, required them solely thus to take upon them this covenant.

2. *The members of the Christian church are, in my view, required to enter into the same covenant, in the same public manner.*

In Isa. xlv. 22, God says, *Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God; and there is none else. I have sworn by myself, the word has gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return; that unto me every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall swear.* In this passage, as quoted Rom. xiv. 11, by the apostle Paul, the word rendered *swear,* is translated *confess;* εξομολογησεται, as it had before been by the LXX. This, I think, is a direct proof of the real meaning of the word *swear,* when used in this manner in the Old Testament. The same meaning

appears to be given by God himself in the following verse in Isaiah. *Surely shall one say, In the Lord have I righteousness and strength.* The verb ομολογεω, signifies indifferently, *to profess* and *confess;* and being thus a translation both by the LXX. and St. Paul, of the Hebrew verb which signifies *to swear,* may be considered, wherever it is used with the same reference, or in the absolute manner, as having the same meaning. In allusion to the same passage of Isaiah, and with an almost literal translation of it, St. Paul says, Phil. ii. 10, *that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.* Here the same verb is used, and translated *confess.* In 1 Tim. vi. 12, the same verb, and its kindred substantive, are rendered *profess;* as also in 2 Cor. ix. 13; Heb. iii. 1; Heb. iv. 14; Heb. x. 23, &c. The truth is, the words *profess* and *confess* differ only in this; that one of them denotes *an acknowledgment made with, the other without, any supposed present or previous reluctance.* Wherever such reluctance is not supposed, it ought to be translated *profess.* The duty of men to make this profession, and their future performance of it, our Saviour clearly discloses in Matt. x. 32. *Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father who is in heaven.* In exact conformity to this declaration, St. Paul says, Rom. ix. 10, *If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead; thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.* In both these passages the word ought to be *profess* and *profession.* It is not easy to conceive how, in so short a compass, the duty of making a profession of religion could, without a precept in form, be more strongly enjoined than it is in these two passages. The same duty is strongly indicated from the passage above quoted from the 2d to the Philippians.

It may naturally and reasonably be asked, *Why, in a case of so much importance, we are not furnished with express precepts solemnly enjoining this duty?* I answer, that the Scriptures have pursued the same plan in this particu-

lar, with respect to this subject, which they have pursued with respect to several others of similar importance; in the cases, for example, *of infant baptism*, and *the observation of the Christian sabbath*. In the Jewish church, a public profession of religion was abundantly enjoined. The Christian church was only a continuation of the same church under a new form. It seems to have been unnecessary, so far as we can judge, to repeat a command which had already been so amply given. Especially was this unnecessary for Jews, among whom the Christian church commenced, and among whom alone it continued to exist for about twelve years. All these were familiarized from their childhood to such a profession; and acknowledged that to make it was their indispensable duty.

The existence of this profession among the first Christians is often exhibited in the New Testament. Thus St. Paul, 2 Cor. ix. 13, says to these Christians concerning their fellow-Christians, *They glorified God for your professed subjection unto the gospel of Christ;* better rendered, *for your subjection to the gospel of Christ, which you have profesed.* In Heb. iv. 14. St. Paul says, *Seeing then that we have a great High-Priest who is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession.* And again, Heb. x. 21. 23. *Having a High-Priest over the house of God, let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering: for he is faithful who promised.* In these instances a profession of faith or of religion is evidently spoken of as having been made by Christians universally. *To Timothy*, the same apostle says, 1 Tim. vi. 22, *Fight the good fight of faith; lay hold on eternal life; whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed,* or *having professed, a good profession before many witnesses.* What Timothy did in this respect, is reasonably supposed to have been done by all other Christians.

The answer of a good conscience towards God, mentioned by St. Peter as given at the time of baptism, 1 Pet. iii. 21, denotes, in my view, the same profession.

St. John speaks of the same thing; and sufficiently indicates its necessity and universality, when he says, *Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God; God dwelleth in him, and he in God.* 1 John iv. 15. And again,

For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.

From these passages of Scripture, it appears to me evident, that Christians are required, not only to believe the religion of Christ in their hearts, but also to profess it with their mouths; that such a profession was universally made by the Christians under the conduct of the apostles; and that such as did not make this profession, were not considered as Christians.

3. *So far as I know, all those modern churches who do not insist on a public, verbal profession of religion, as a term of admission to their communion, either demand a private one, or consider the proposal to enter into their communion as being in itself such a profession.*

The difference of opinion here respects evidently, not the substance of the thing in debate; not the duty of making a profession, but merely *the manner in which it shall be made.* Whatever modes may be adopted by different churches, there seems to be no debate between them concerning the main object. All of them suppose *a profession to be actually made.* About the manner of making it the Scriptures have, I think, left room for some latitude of opinion; about the profession itself, I think they have left none. Every communicant is, I believe, supposed by every church, not grossly warped from the faith, to have made a profession of the religion of the gospel when he entered the church.

Having now, as I hope, given a scriptural, and therefore a just, account of this subject, I will proceed to illustrate the main doctrine of the discourse, from *the nature of the covenant into which Christians enter in making this profession.* This transaction is obviously the most important and the most solemn of those which exist between the soul and its Maker: its public reintroduction into his name, favour, family, service, and eternal kingdom. The subject of it, the soul, is of inestimable value. The time is the sabbath; the place, the sanctuary; the occasion, the public worship of God; the most solemn of all occasions, places, and times. The being with whom we are immediately concerned, is JEHOVAH. The foundation on which the transaction rests, is the atonement of Christ, the Mediator of the new cove-

nant. The things which we profess, are no other than that we choose God as our God, and give ourselves to him as his children. God is the Father, the Redeemer, and the Sanctifier, of men; the best Friend; the supreme Benefactor; and the highest Portion. He is also the righteous Lawgiver and Sovereign of the universe. In this covenant we publicly avouch him as *our God*, in all these characters.

Ourselves, as children, we devote to him with all our talents and services; engaging through his grace to obey, honour, and glorify him, according to his good pleasure as revealed to us in the Scriptures.

The consequences of this transaction are, eternal life, virtue, and glory.

Can it be asked, whether in such a transaction God requires that we should be sincere; that we should mean what we say; and that with the heart we should choose him as our God, and give ourselves to him as his children? In such a transaction, can he fail to *require truth in the inward parts?* Surely in this case, if any, he demands that we should not *love in word nor in tongue, but in deed and in truth.* If Ananias and Sapphira were so awfully punished for insincerity in professing to give their property to God, can the guilt be less of those who insincerely profess to give their souls? The views which God entertains concerning this covenant, are strongly declared when he so frequently styles it an *oath.* He who has thoroughly considered the guilt of perjury will, I think, be well prepared to estimate justly that of intentional falsehood in this still more solemn transaction.

IV. *The doctrine is forcibly illustrated by the nature of Christian communion.*

Christian communion is *a participation of the heart in the same interests and pursuits of evangelical religion.*

That evangelical *love* is indispensable to such communion is evident from 1 John i. 7. *If we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another.* Here walking in divine light, or possessing evangelical religion, is exhibited as absolutely necessary to the existence of fellowship among Christians. The same truth is also taught in *the questions immediately following the text.* In these questions it is most explicitly declared, that there is no fel-

lowship, no communion, between the righteous and the unrighteous, between believers and unbelievers.

What the Scriptures thus declare, both reason and experience unanswerably prove. The doctrines and precepts embraced by persons of these opposite dispositions, may be indeed, and have in many instances been, in substance the same. Yet even here there would often be very serious diversities; furnishing a wide foundation for very unhappy differences. *The iron and the clay*, however nicely fashioned into well-proportioned members, and however skilfully united, so as apparently to constitute a single body, would yet, whenever the form began to move, be easily separated; and shew that it was *partly iron* and *partly clay*. Frequently also persons, so unlike in their wishes, although originally agreeing in these respects, would cease from this agreement by the mere progress of events. Unrenewed men, continuing unrenewed to old age, often give up their original orthodoxy, and wander very far from the truth. All this is abundantly attested by experience.

Still more unharmonious would these two classes be in their dispositions. Men who disagree in the essential doctrines and precepts of religion, and often in those which are unessential, are apt, whatever may be their dispositions, to agree very imperfectly in their views and measures. When they are possessed of dispositions very unlike, especially when wholly opposed, it is impossible for them to act together with harmony or success. Religion is an object of so much importance, that by men really religious it cannot be given up. It cannot be given up in *parts:* it cannot be modified, softened, or in any manner altered, so as to make it more palatable or less offensive to those with whom they have intercourse. All its doctrines are taught, and all its duties enjoined, by the authority of God. Pious men therefore can neither add, diminish, nor alter. Yet such alterations would often be very convenient, and therefore very pleasing, to their unrenewed brethren: and such as refuse to make them, would be pronounced illiberal, imprudent, unkind, and bigoted. Among persons so circumstanced, harmony is already destroyed.

One of the great Christian duties is, *the reproof of our brethren for their faults.* A religious man is prepared by

his religion, both to administer and receive evangelical reproof with the meekness and gentleness of the gospel. In his view a sin is a great evil; to reclaim or be reclaimed from which is a pre-eminent blessing. Reproof is the proper, efficacious, and evangelical means of communicating or acquiring this blessing; and will therefore be administered and received with the kindness of the gospel.

But to sinners, *reproof* is the pain, and *sin* the pleasure; for reproof will always be regarded merely as the means of restraining and lessening this pleasure. It will be viewed therefore with feelings of hostility; and he who administers it will be considered as an enemy. Nor will the sinner himself ordinarily administer it to others, unless when prompted by some selfish motive; nor without very visible emotions of superiority, resentment, or contempt. Sinners therefore are plainly unqualified to take any useful part in this important branch of Christian communion.

Nor are they better fitted either for giving or receiving *religious consolation*. It is plainly impossible for them to enter cordially and deeply into interests which they never felt; to indulge emotions which they never experienced; to feel the force of motives whose import they cannot understand; or to derive either peace or hope from the truths or promises of a religion, to which, though professing it, they are still strangers.

But a single point will set this part of the subject in the clearest light. It is this; Christ has enjoined upon all his followers, *brotherly love*. This affection, as I have formerly observed, is that which is commonly called *complacency*, or *the love of virtue;* and is directed not like benevolence, towards *the happiness of intelligent beings*, but towards *the virtue of good beings*. That sinners cannot exercise this affection will not be questioned. But this is not the point at which I aim. *Christians* cannot exercise this affection towards *sinners;* because sinners do not possess the virtue which this command requires Christians to love. Christ cannot require of his disciples any thing which is physically impossible; but it is physically impossible to love virtue in those who have it not. Yet Christ has required *all the members of his church* to exercise this affection *towards all*. He intended therefore in this command, as well as else-

where, that all the members of his church should be such as could be the objects of this affection.

To this command he accordingly subjoins the following declaration: *Hereby shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye love one another.* But it is impossible that sinners who are not his disciples, should be known to be his disciples. Sinners therefore were not included by him in the number of those of whom he speaks in these passages; or, in other words, are not proper members of his church.

Universally; There is, there can be, between Christians and sinners, as members of the church of Christ, no community of interests, views, affections, or designs. A church intentionally made up of these discordant materials, may be a decent company of men; but it will very imperfectly sustain the character of a church of Christ.

V. *With similar clearness is the doctrine illustrated by the nature of Christian discipline.*

Of this subject I can give only a very summary exhibition. Christian discipline consists of *private exhortation, public admonition,* and *excommunication.* The end of all these administrations is the amendment of the offender, and the peace, purity, and edification, of the church. By every Christian they will be regarded as institutions eminently useful to himself, and eminently beneficial to that great interest which supremely engrosses his heart. To him therefore they will be objects of affection and reverence. When a fellow-Christian expostulates with him kindly, evangelically, and between themselves, concerning a fault which he has really committed, he will be *gained by his brother;* because, with a Christian spirit and with Christian views, he will feel that his brother has designed good to *him,* and conscientiously performed *his own* duty. Under the influence of the same spirit, he will receive an admonition from the church with reverence and awe; because he knows that the church is merely discharging the same duty, and aiming at the same benevolent end. Even if he should be excommunicated, an event which in such a church will rarely take place, he will of course, when his passions have subsided, and the period of self-examination has returned, resume the character of a penitent; humbly acknowledge the rectitude

of the administration; and by an ingenuous confession of his fault, and the reformation of his life, become reconciled to his fellow-Christians.

Sinners, on the contrary, will receive all these acts of discipline with reluctance and resentment; and will never realize their necessity, nor their usefulness. The faults for which discipline is instituted, they will usually consider as commendable actions, as matters of indifference, or at the worst as mere peccadillos, about which no man ought to feel any serious concern. Remonstrances against them they will regard as flowing from personal pique, pride, or a spirit of meddling; and every subsequent measure of discipline, as springing out of bigotry, persecution, or revenge. An ecclesiastical process will be viewed by them as a mere prosecution; and those concerned in it against them, as mere litigants, influenced only by selfish passions, and not by a sense of duty.

In the administration of discipline, unless stimulated by such passions, they will either not unite at all, or unite with indifference and reluctance. They will be too prudent to provoke their neighbours, and too worldly to trouble themselves about the peace or purity of the church. It may I believe be truly said, that Christian discipline never was, and never will be, for any length of time maintained, where the majority of those intrusted with it are, or have been, men of this character.

VI. *This truth is decisively proved by the manner in which the Christian church is spoken of in the New Testament.*

The common name for the church in the Old Testament is *Zion*. Under this name it is spoken of as a *holy hill;* as *loved by God;* as *the heritage of God;* as *the Zion of the Holy One of Israel.* It is said, that *Christ is her king;* that *God will place salvation in her;* that *he will reign in her;* that *he commands there the blessing, even life for ever more.* In these, and a multitude of other instances, exactly the same character is given of the church under the Mosaic, which was afterward given of it under the Christian dispensation. This fact furnishes unanswerable proof that

the church was intentionally formed, and is actually regarded, in the same manner by God in every age.

The character of the church, as given in the New Testament, will be sufficiently learned from the following passages.

To the church at Rome, St. Paul writes in these terms: *Among whom are ye also the called of Jesus Christ. To all that are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints. First I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all; that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.* Rom. i. 6—8.

And I myself am persuaded of you, my brethren, that ye also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another. Rom. xv. 14.

To the Corinthians he writes, *Unto the church of God, which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints. I thank my God always on your behalf for the grace of God which is given you by Christ Jesus.* 1 Cor. i. 2. 4.

To the Galatians he writes, *Now we brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of the promise.* Gal. iv. 28.

To the Ephesians he writes, *Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints who are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus.* Eph. i. 1.

To the Philippians he writes, *I thank my God for your fellowship in the gospel, from the first day until now; being confident of this very thing, that he who hath begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.* Phil. i. 3. 5, 6.

To the Colossians he writes, *Paul, an apostle, to the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are at Colosse; We give thanks to God, since we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have to all the saints, for the hope which is laid up for you in heaven.* Col. i. 1—5.

To the Thessalonians he writes, *We give thanks to God alway for you all, remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope, in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God, even our Father; knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God.* 1 Thess. i. 4.

To the Hebrews he writes, *Brethren, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation.* Heb. vi. 9.

St. James, speaking of himself, and of the churches to whom he wrote, says, *Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures.* James i. 18.

St. Peter writes to the churches in Pontus, &c. *Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience, and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.* 1 Pet. i. 2.

St. John says, *I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you. I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one.* 1 John ii. 12, 13.

St. Jude, addressing his epistle to the churches generally, writes, *To them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called.* Jude 1.

With this language every thing found in the New Testament perfectly harmonizes. One character, and one only, is given in it of the church; and that is the character of Christians. There is no mixture of any other character. Even when the faults of its members are mentioned, they are mentioned solely as the backslidings of Christians; and never as the sins of unbelieving and impenitent men. How then can we entertain a rational doubt, *that God, when he instituted his church, intended it to be an assembly of believers?*

SERMON CL.

EXTRAORDINARY MEANS OF GRACE.

OFFICERS OF THE CHURCH. MINISTERS OF THE GOSPEL. WHO ARE MINISTERS.

The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed. Feed the flock of God which is among you; taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind: neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.—1 PET. v. 1—3.

IN the preceding discourse concerning *the constitution of the Christian church*, I observed, that *the church is composed of its ordinary members, and its officers. The character of its ordinary members* I investigated at that time. I shall now consider

The character of its officers.

Before I commence the direct examination of this subject, I shall make a few preliminary observations.

1. *The Scriptures have actually constituted certain officers in the church.*

Whatever differences of opinion exist concerning *the kinds* of officers in the church designated by the Scriptures, it is agreed by most, if not all Christians, that such officers, of some kind or other, are established by the sacred volume. We there read of *ministers, pastors, teachers, bishops*, &c. By these names, it is generally acknowledged, officers of one or more classes were denoted, who were intended always to be found in the Christian church. Certain powers also they were intended to possess and certain duties to perform.

2. *Whatever the Scriptures have said of these men is of divine authority and obligation: but nothing else is of such authority, nor at all obligatory on the consciences of mankind.*

Whatever the Scriptures have instituted, required, or directed, is instituted, required, and directed, by *God;* and is invested with his authority. All else, by whomsoever said, or in what age soever, is said by *man.* But man has no authority over the conscience, and can never bind his fellow-man in any religious concern whatever. If then we find in the present, or any past age, any thing said on the subject, whether by divines or others, however learned and esteemed they may have been, which at the same time is not said in the Scriptures; it is totally destitute of any authority or obligation with respect to *us.* It may or may not be said wisely. It may be good or bad advice or opinion; but it cannot, in any degree, have the nature of law; nor be at all obligatory on their fellow-men.

The fathers of the church, for example, were in many instances good, and in some wise, men. They are often valuable witnesses to facts. On a variety of occasions they help us to the true meaning of words, phrases, and passages, in the Scriptures. They often edify us also by their piety. But their opinion, or judgment, or injunctions, are totally destitute of authority; and stand upon exactly the same level with those of men who now sustain a similar character. If we could rely on the authenticity of *the smaller epistles of St. Ignatius,* or had we the *autographs* in our possession, all the injunctions and declarations contained in them, exclusively of those derived from the Scriptures, would be *mere advice* or information.

3. *Whatever church-officers the Scriptures have established as standing officers, are appointed by God himself. The church, therefore, is bound to receive them as having been thus appointed; and to take effectual care, that they always exist.*

This will not be denied by any man who admits the divine revelation of the Scriptures.

4. *No other officers beside those thus appointed have any authority to plead for their existence in office. All others are of mere human institution; convenient and useful per-*

haps; but never to be regarded as possessing any authority, except what arises from the personal consent or engagement of those who receive them; and this can never be obligatory on the consciences of others.

It is to no purpose here to allege, that they have been introduced and established by the deliberate determination of wise and good men; or of the whole church. It is to no purpose to allege, that they have existed for any length of time, however great; nor that they have existed in various churches, however distinguished for learning and piety. It is to no purpose to allege, that these churches have believed them to be divinely instituted. This belief, respectable as those are who have entertained it, can claim no more authority, and involves no more obligation, than any other opinion concerning any other subject.

5. *If the Scriptures have constituted officers in the church, and have partially and imperfectly designated their classes, numbers, offices, and duties, then this imperfect exhibition of the subject, and this alone, is of divine authority and obligation.*

It has been often supposed, that God has, of design, left the subject of ecclesiastical government partially exhibited in the Scriptures. Whatever else was necessary to complete the system, he is farther supposed to have left to be supplied by the prudence of Christians, as the various circumstances of the church, in various ages and countries, might require. If this supposition be admitted, then whatever is contained in this imperfect institution of ecclesiastical government, in the Scriptures, is authoritative and obligatory; and whatever is supplied by human wisdom to complete the system, is merely advisory and prudential.

The full admission of these principles would, as it seems to me, prepare the way for a final removal of most disputes concerning this subject.

These things being premised as indispensable to a just decision concerning this subject, I observe, that *the system of ecclesiastical government mentioned in the Scriptures, is disclosed by them, either completely or partially.* If they have completely disclosed this system, then we shall find it all in the sacred volume; and cannot need to search for

it elsewhere. If they have disclosed it partially, then a partial disclosure was sufficient; and this part is all that possesses, or can possess, any authority to bind the consciences of men. Whatever additions are made to it, and however wisely or necessarily they are made by men, they cannot pretend to the least authority or obligation. It is in vain to say, that in this case the church would be left at loose ends, and unprotected against disorder and schism. The answer to this objection is obvious and complete. The church is left as infinite wisdom chose to leave it. Should we grant, contrary to truth and decency, that the situation in which it is left is not the best; still the evil is without remedy: for we cannot add to the words of God.

Let us now inquire what ecclesiastical officers are mentioned in the Scriptures as instituted by God.

The largest and most particular account given of this subject in the Scriptures, is in Eph. iv. 11. *And he gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers.* Here we find at least four sorts of officers in the church; four classes of men who are empowered each to do some things in the church, which they, and they only, had a right to do.

The office of *apostles* is acknowledged on all hands long since to have terminated.

Of *prophets*, it is only necessary to observe, that their office must terminate of course, when inspiration terminates.

Evangelists, the third class here mentioned, are universally acknowledged to have been *extraordinary officers*, and to have ceased in a very early period of the church; unless the word be supposed to denote merely a minister without a cure.

There remain then only *pastors* and *teachers*. From the phraseology here used, it appears to me evident, that they were not *two* distinct orders of men, but *one*, destined to feed and teach the church. The language is not, as in the preceding clauses, *some pastors*, and *some teachers*, but *some pastors and teachers*, that is, *some who were both pastors and teachers*. To *teach* the church *is to feed it with the bread of life.*

Some Christian churches have supposed, that teachers

were men who, holding the pastoral office, were particularly to be employed *in teaching candidates for the ministry*, whatever was necessary to qualify them for this office. Others have believed, that they were destined to the employment *of teaching and defending evangelical truth generally; without taking upon themselves the care of particular churches.* As all these, so far as I know, consider both kinds of officers as of the same rank, and as invested with exactly the same powers; it will be unnecessary at the present time to examine this opinion.

We are come then to *one class of permanent ecclesiastical officers* mentioned in this text; viz. *that which is known by the word pastors.*

The apostle is here recounting those officers which Christ gave to the church when he ascended to heaven; and it must, I think, be admitted, that he mentions all those which Christ gave to the church directly, or in his own person. All other ecclesiastical officers constituted in the Scriptures, were therefore constituted afterward by the apostles. Of these I know of but one class mentioned in the Scriptures; viz. *deacons.* In Acts vi. seven men are said to have been chosen to this office, and set apart *by prayer and the laying on of hands.*

The only debate concerning this subject respects the class, or classes, of officers denoted by the word pastors. In my own opinion, *this word includes a single class only;* spoken of elsewhere in the Scriptures under the names *elders, bishops, ministers, teachers,* and some others. This opinion I shall endeavour to support by the following arguments derived from the word of God. Of these I allege,

1. The text.

The text is addressed directly to the pastors of the Christian church, under the name *elders;* derived, as is that of *pastor,* also from the Old Testament. In the customary language of the Jews, the word elders denoted *the rulers* and *counsellors* of that nation: as some corresponding word has often denoted, either generally or particularly, the rulers and counsellors of other nations. Thus among the Romans *senātor,* and among ourselves *sēnator,* denoted an officer similar to the Jewish elder. Human wisdom is chiefly the result of experience; and experience is the re-

sult of years. Nations therefore, peculiarly when unenlightened by science, have committed the direction of public affairs, and public counsels, almost exclusively to the aged. The name, in this appropriate sense, was naturally transferred to those who were to counsel and direct the church; especially by the apostles as being Jews, and writing originally for their own countrymen. These elders are exhorted to *feed*, that is, *to teach, edify*, and *rule, the flock of God*. That the Greek word ποιμαινω, a derivative of which is here translated *feed*, signifies to *rule* in the most extensive manner, can be doubted by no man at all conversant with the Greek language, either in the classics, or the New Testament. They are also directed to *take the oversight of it*, or in more exact language, *to oversee it* (they had already *taken* the oversight of it); *willingly; not of constraint, nor for the sake of gain*. The Greek word, rendered *taking the oversight*, is επισκοπουντες, exactly rendered *overseeing*, or *exercising the office of an overseer*, or *bishop*.

Elders, therefore, were to exercise the office of a bishop or overseer, and of course were invested with that office. To this the only reply is, that *elder is a generic term, including both bishops and ordinary elders* or *ministers*. *This* will be considered farther on. At present I observe, that these directions are given to elders absolutely, and as elders merely; and to all elders therefore without distinction. I know not by what warrant we can suppose, that St. Peter, writing with the spirit of inspiration, has written so loosely, as to express that in the most absolute manner which was intended in a very limited sense; so limited as to exclude nineteen twentieths of all those who are apparently included in his direction; while at the same time he has given no notice, either before or after, of this design. What, in such a case, must be the construction of this passage by the elders to whom it was written, and what their consequent conduct in obedience to it? If it be supposed by us, who have the whole Bible before us, that this strange construction ought to be given to it; would it be possible for these elders, who had no other writing of this apostle, and few of them probably any other writings of the New Testament,

to understand that what is here obviously made the duty of every elder, was really the duty of one only out of many?

2. *I allege Acts* xx. 17. 28, *And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church.* A part of the directions which he gave to these elders is recited thus: *Take heed therefore to yourselves, and to all the flock over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.*

On these two verses thus connected, I remark,

First. *That in Ephesus there were several elders of the church.*

Secondly. *That all these elders were bishops.*

The word rendered in the English translation, *overseers*, is in the original επισκοπους, the only word in the New Testament which is rendered *bishop*. The word *bishop* is synonymous with *overseer*.

Thirdly. *That the* HOLY GHOST *constituted or made these several elders bishops.* The original word is εθετο, *constituted.*

Fourthly. *That in Ephesus all the elders of the church were bishops.* These were plainly all the elders of that church: as is evident from the phraseology. The words are, *And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church.*

Fifthly. *That therefore there was no one bishop of superior authority; or holding an office or character which distinguished him from other bishops in that city.*

Sixthly. *That Timothy could not be, although he is extensively supposed to have been, the sole bishop or diocesan of the church in that city; because other men were bishops in that church.*

The elders to whom St. Peter wrote in the text, were all who dwelt in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia Proper, and Bithynia: provinces constituting more than two thirds of that great country, called the Lesser Asia; at that time full of churches and Christians. *All the elders of all these churches he exhorts to exercise the office of a bishop in the church.*

All the elders in Ephesus, the chief city in the same coun-

try, St. Paul declares *to have been constituted bishops by the Holy Ghost. Both* apostles speak the same language to the same persons: language which has obviously but one meaning.

These passages in the most explicit manner teach us, that elders universally, and bishops, are the same persons, destined to exactly the same purposes, and invested with exactly the same powers.

3. *I allege,* Phil. i, *Paul and Timotheus, servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus, who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons.*

Concerning this passage I observe,

First. *That there is no mention made of elders in this church by name.*

The saints, with the bishops and deacons, are expressly mentioned. If there were elders in this church who were distinct from the bishops, the omission of them is inexplicable. If elders be allowed to have been officers *inferior* to bishops, they were unquestionably *superior* to deacons; and it is incredible, that this letter should not have been addressed to *them* also, when it was addressed to *the deacons.* The important interest and office which they held in this church rendered it highly proper, that the contents of the letter should be addressed personally to them; more so certainly than that it should be addressed to the deacons. Had it been addressed *to bishops, elders, and deacons, it would have been thought,* by an advocate for prelatical episcopacy, *absolutely decisive in favour of three orders of ecclesiastical officers.* As it now stands, and as it is uncontradicted by any other passage of Scripture, I think it is equally decisive, *that there were but two.*

Secondly. *It is certain, that in the Philippian church there were several bishops; and, therefore, whatever was the the case with other churches in this respect, there was not at Philippi a single bishop presiding over a number of subordinate ministers.* But there is no reason to conclude, that the Philippian church was, in this respect, differently constituted from other churches.

4. *I allege the fact, that no mention is made of bishops, by way of address (except the text just quoted from Philippians* i. 1), *or direction, or salutation.*

The word επισκοπος (*bishop* or *overseer*) occurs in the New Testament *five times*. *Once* it is applied to Christ; *viz.* 1 Pet. ii. 25; and *four times* denotes officers in the church. The word επισκοπη is *once* used to denote *the office of a bishop;* viz. 1 Tim. iii. 1; in *two instances*, to denote *visitation;* Luke xix. 44. 1 Pet. ii. 12.; and *once* is quoted from Psal. cix. 8, *to denote*, by way of accommodation, *the employment of Judas as an apostle.* Επισκοπεω, *to oversee, or exercise the office of a bishop*, is used *once with that meaning;* viz. in the text, and *once*, Heb. xii. 15. where it is translated, with exact propriety, *looking diligently.*

In all the *addresses* of their several letters by the apostles to the several churches, *there is not*, except in that just mentioned, *a single allusion to bishops, as a peculiar order of men.* In the numerous *salutations* with which the epistles are concluded, and in the several *directions* given to the churches, there is not the least mention made, nor the least hint given, concerning this class of officers.

Had such a class existed, to whom the government of churches and subordinate ministers was chiefly or wholly committed; is it credible, that no mention should be made of them in the numerous directions given for the government of the church? There are several proper cases of discipline mentioned in the Epistle to the Corinthians; particularly, the case *of the man who had his father's wife.* St. Paul directs the whole church of Corinth, *when gathered together in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and his Spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver this person to Satan, for the destruction of the flesh:* 1 Cor. v. 1. 4, 5; that is, *to excommunicate him.* The church did excommunicate him. Of this fact St. Paul gives us an account, 2 Cor. ii. 5, 6, where he says, *Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many;* υπο των πλειονων, *by the majority, or the chief part of the members.* Had there been a bishop intrusted with the government of the church at Corinth, (and if not at Corinth, where could we expect to find such bishops?) is it credible, that this important act of church-government should not have been assigned to him; and afterward recited as having been executed by him, or at least under his authority? Is it

credible, that in all the mention which is made of government in the church, there should no where be any mention made of bishops, as particularly concerned in this subject? What is said in the Epistles to Timothy and Titus, and may be thought inconsistent with this remark, I shall consider hereafter.

In all the salutations also directed universally to all the saints, and to many humbler individuals by name, there is no mention made of bishops. Yet several of the epistles are addressed to churches, in cities of great eminence, where bishops must, if any where, have resided. The passage in Heb. xiii. 24, *Salute them who have the rule over you*, I shall examine in another place.

5. *I allege also the commission originally given to ministers of the gospel.*

This is found at length in Matt. xxviii. 19, 20. *Go ye, disciple all nations; baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things, whatsoever I have commanded you. And lo, I am with you always unto the end of the world. Amen.*

This commission is plainly given to all ministers, because it is given without discrimination, and because it is given to them unto the end of the world. It is their only commission, and conveys the only authority under which they act as ministers. The authority which it conveys is also the same to all. Unless then this commission is qualified elsewhere, there can be no distinction among ministers. Those to whom precisely the same authority is given by the same commission, it is hardly necessary to observe, sustain exactly the same office.

6. *I allege, as proof of the same doctrine, the fact, that the same duties are assigned to all ministers of the gospel.*

The duties assigned to ministers of the gospel, *are public and private prayer in the church; preaching the gospel; administering baptism, and the Lord's supper; ruling; and ordaining other ministers.* All these are assigned to elders universally, in as plain language as any which is used about these subjects. With regard to the *three first* of these duties, this will not be questioned. The whole de-

bate respects the *two last.* I shall therefore consider these particularly.

Concerning ruling the church, we have the following passages.

A bishop must be one that ruleth well in his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity.

For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God. 1 Tim. iii. 2. 4, 5.

Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honour: especially they who labour in the word and doctrine. 1 Tim. v. 17.

In the first of these passages, a bishop is required to rule well. In the second it is required, that the elders who rule well, should be accounted worthy of double honour. So far as these two passages are concerned, it will not be questioned, that ruling is assigned, as explicitly to elders, as to bishops; nor that the elder is equally entitled with the bishop to the employment of ruling. But this is the only passage in the New Testament in which ruling is expressly assigned to a bishop; unless the word rendered bishop should be supposed to contain such an assignment.

The character of Timothy and Titus, as bishops, will be hereafter considered.

In Rom. xii. 8 it is said, *He that ruleth is* required to do this duty *with diligence.* This passage plainly lies out of the debate.

In Heb. xiii. 7 the apostle says, *Remember them who have the rule over you, who have spoken to you the word of life. Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves; for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account,* ver. 17. *Salute all them that have the rule over you, and all the saints. They of Italy salute you.*

Here we find the rule over the church or churches to whom this epistle was directed committed to many hands; *Them that have the rule over you; and all them that have the rule over you.* If this epistle was sent to a single church, or to the churches of a single city (Jerusalem for instance); then in that church, or in the churches of that city, there were several persons who had the rule over

these churches. That it was thus sent is both reasonable in the nature of the case; because otherwise there would be nobody to receive, to keep, or to testify to, a part of the canon of Scripture; and because, in the last-quoted verse, they of Italy are said to salute the persons to whom it was written. Of course, these rulers cannot have been bishops of extensive diocesses; but ordinary ministers of the church.

In accordance with this opinion, the most judicious divines have supposed this epistle to have been directed to the Hebrews in Palestine; and particularly those in Jerusalem.

The rulers spoken of in the 7th verse have been supposed to be dead at the time when the epistle was written: the latter end of the year 63. St. James the Less, often called the bishop of Jerusalem, died probably about one year before this time. He was the only person who with any pretence can be supposed to have ruled them as a bishop. Plainly James the brother of John, and Stephen the protomartyr, were not, as Theodoret supposes, at all concerned in ruling this church. If the other James had been their bishop, it is not easy to conceive how, in such a passage, there should be no hint concerning his ruling over them; and how St. Paul, if their government had not been committed to a considerable number of persons, should have written as he has done in this verse.

In the two last of these verses, the rulers mentioned were still living; and, from the language used, existed in considerable numbers. At the same time, no bishop is mentioned, or alluded to, in any manner of distinction whatever. Ecclesiastical government therefore was not, at the time when this epistle was written, in the hands of a diocesan bishop at Jerusalem. To say the least, such a fact receives no countenance from the Epistle to the Hebrews. These are the only passages in which ruling, and the character of rulers, in the church, are directly mentioned in the Scriptures. I presume it is plain from these passages, that ruling is at least as directly and as extensively ascribed to elders as to bishops; and that, so far as these texts are concerned, it belongs to the former as extensively as to the latter.

But *preaching* is every where in the Scriptures exhibited

as an employment superior to that of ruling. In the passage quoted from 1 Tim. v. 17 this truth is decisively exhibited. *Let the elders who rule well be accounted worthy of double honour* (that is, of high honour); *especially they who labour in the word and doctrine.* Here St. Paul directs, that preaching elders should be accounted worthy of more honour than ruling elders. As the rulers are here supposed to *rule well;* that is, to do their duty faithfully; it is clear, that the superior honour given to those who preach, is given only on account of the superiority of their employment.

Preaching was the first business on which the apostles, and afterward the LXX. were sent. It was also the first active business of Christ himself; as he has told us in Luke iv. 18, quoted from Isa. lxi. 1. *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me; because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor.*

Of the apostles it is said, Mark iii. 14, *And he ordained twelve that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach.* When they went out on their first mission, Christ said to them, *Go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel; and as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand.* Matt. x. 6, 7.

To the LXX, he said, *Into whatsoever city ye enter, heal the sick that are therein; and say unto them, The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you.* Luke x. 8, 9.

Christ (saith St. Paul) *sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel.*

Again; *I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God to salvation.* Rom. i. 16.

Again; *When it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the Heathen.* Gal. i. 15.

According to this scheme, the Scriptures are full of commands, exhortations, discussions, descriptions, and other exhibitions, concerning preaching the gospel, as the great duty of ministers. In all these it is presented as the most important business of a minister; compared with which every other is of a very subordinate nature. Ruling, on the contrary, is mentioned but six times in the New Testament; and there without a hint of its possessing any pecu-

liar consequence. If elders, therefore, had been distinguished from bishops by inferiority of power as rulers; they would still hold a higher and more important employment, as decided by the Scriptures. If there are different classes of ministers, the preacher is certainly made in the New Testament superior to the ruler. Yet ruling is the peculiar employment professedly assigned to the supposed higher class of ministers. Can this scheme consist with what we have just now heard from the Scriptures?

The subject of *ordaining ministers* is mentioned nine times: four in the phraseology of *laying on hands;* and five in other varying terms.

And he, that is Christ, *ordained twelve, that they should be with him.* Mark iii. 14. The Greek word here is εποιησε, *constituted. Wherefore of these men* (says St. Peter) *must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection.* Acts i. 21, 22. The Greek word is here γενεσθαι, *become.*

And when they (the apostles) *had ordained them elders in every church.* Acts xiv. 23. Here the Greek word is, χειροτονησαντες, originally signifying *to stretch out the hand;* then *to elect with uplifted hands;* and afterward *to appoint, or constitute to an office. Whereunto* (says St. Paul) *I am ordained a preacher, and an apostle.* 1 Tim. ii. 7. The Greek word here is ετεθην, *I was appointed.*

For this cause left I thee in Crete; that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city. Here the Greek word is καταστησης, *constitute.* It is doubtful whether ordaining, in the ecclesiastical sense is intended in either of these passages, except the third, Acts xiv, 23, and even this will admit of serious debate.

In the last, to wit, Tit. i. 5, the power of ordaining has been supposed to be attributed to a bishop. The justice of this supposition must be determined by answers to two questions. The first is, whether καταστησης signifies *ordination* in the appropriate sense; or *to constitute* elders, already ordained, *ministers of particular churches:* or, in other words, to appoint them their particular places of administration.

The second is, whether Titus was a bishop in the pre-

latical sense. This subject will be examined in its proper place.

The four remaining instances are mentioned in the appropriate language of *laying on hands;* επιτιθημι χειρας, phraseology which usually denotes ecclesiastical ordination in the proper sense. They are the following: *Whom,* that is, the seven deacons first chosen, *they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them.* Acts vi. 6. *And when they* (that is, the apostles) *had fasted, and prayed, and laid hands on them,* viz. Paul and Barnabas, *they sent them away.* Acts xiii. 3.

Lay hands suddenly on no man. 1 Tim. i. 22.

Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, and the laying on of the hands of the presbytery, or body of elders.

In all these instances ordination, in the appropriate sense, is undoubtedly intended. As the apostles laid hands on those, to whom they communicated the miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost, the same phraseology is used twice with reference to this subject, Acts viii. 17. 19, both but one instance; and 1 Tim. i. 6. It is also used to denote the laying on of the hands of him who offered a sin-offering. Heb. vi. 2.

Of the *four instances* in which this phraseology denotes ecclesiastical ordination, it is, *in two,* attributed to the apostles generally. In *the third,* Timothy is commanded to *lay hands suddenly on no man.* That is, not hastily to ordain, or to be concerned in ordaining, any man, lest he should prove an unsuitable person for the ministry. *In the fourth,* the ordination of Timothy is attributed to the whole body of presbyters or elders who united in his ordination. Of these instances, the only ones of this nature in the Bible, it is perfectly plain, that there is but one in which ordination can possibly be ascribed by any construction to persons who were bishops in the modern sense: *viz.* the passage in which Timothy is commanded to lay hands suddenly on no man. Here the ascription depends wholly on the fact, that Timothy was such a bishop, and bishop of Ephesus: a fact which it is presumed cannot be established. Leaving this however for the present, I ob-

serve, that, were it to be granted, still, as Timothy's own ordination is directly ascribed to the presbytery only, the Scriptures attribute ordination, at least as evidently and as extensively, to presbyters, as to bishops.

9 Of this power also, as well as that of ruling, it is to be observed, when compared with preaching, very little stress is laid on it in the Scriptures. It is mentioned but *nine times*, even if we adopt the utmost latitude of construction; and in all these, except *two*, is mentioned incidentally. In *one* of these two, St. Paul commands Timothy to lay hands suddenly on no man, 1 Tim. vi. 16. In the other, he mentions, that he had left Titus in Crete, to ordain elders in every city. *Preaching the gospel*, on the contrary, is, throughout the New Testament, and often in the Old, exhibited as the great duty of a Christian minister; as his chief, most useful, and most honourable destination. From this state of the subject the conclusion is therefore warrantably drawn, that, in the view of the Scriptures, ordaining is an employment wholly inferior in its nature and importance. Of course, the powers claimed by the bishop as peculiar to his office, are inferior to those confessedly attributed to the elder, and can, in no scriptural sense, become means of raising the former above the latter.

SERMON CLI.

EXTRAORDINARY MEANS OF GRACE.

OFFICERS OF THE CHURCH. MINISTERS OF THE GOSPEL. WHO ARE MINISTERS.

The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed. Feed the flock of God which is among you; taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but a ready mind: neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.—1 PET. v. 1—3.

IN the preceding discourse, I mentioned it as being, in my own opinion, the doctrine of the Scriptures,

That there are but two kinds of permanent officers in the church of Christ.

In support of this doctrine I alleged the following things.

1. *The text.*

2. *Acts* xx. 17. 28.

3. *Philippians* i. 1.

The fact, that, except in this passage, no mention is made of bishops by way of address, direction, or salutation.

5. *The commission originally given to ministers of the gospel.*

6. *The fact, that the same duties are assigned to all such ministers.*

I shall now proceed to support the same doctrine by exhibiting, at some length, *the manner in which ministers are spoken of in the gospel.* This very general head, which I could not conveniently make less general, I shall illustrate from the following sources.

1. *The address of Christ to his apostles,* Mark x. 42. 45, *with the parallel passage.*

Ye know that they who are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them; but it shall not be so among you. For whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister; and whosoever will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. For the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister.

The apostles James and John, as we are informed in the context, had solicited Christ, that they might be exalted to peculiar distinction and authority in his kingdom. The other apostles were offended at this scheme of ambition on the part of their companions, as being themselves desirous of the same elevation. To repress every such feeling in them all, Christ utters the words which have been quoted. These words certainly discourage all wishes for peculiar authority in the minds of the apostles as ministers of Christ; and informed them, that the proper destination of the ambitious among them was the place of a *servant*, or *minister*, to the rest. In other words, Christ required them to be, and to feel themselves to be, equals; and forbade them to assume any authority over each other. The conduct which Christ required of them must, it would seem, be the proper conduct of all succeeding ministers. An absolute equality is plainly here commanded, so far as the *apostles were concerned.* It ought to be shewn, that the case is not directly and entirely applicable to their followers in the sacred office. Let us suppose, that Christ had given the converse directions. Let us suppose, that he had directed James and Peter to be rulers over their brethren. Would not this fact have been pleaded, as decisive authority for the same distinction among succeeding ministers? The mere shadow of such a distinction in favour of Peter, easily shewn to have no substance, has actually been relied on by the church of Rome as a solid foundation of the high pre-eminence assumed by the bishop of that city over all other ministers of the gospel.

Correspondent with this address, and pointing to the same object, is the instruction given by Christ in Matt. xxiii. 6—12; while observing the conduct of the Scribes and Pharisees. Concerning these men our Saviour observes, *They love greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi,*

Rabbi. But, he adds, *be ye not called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ. And call no man father upon the earth: for one is your Father who is in heaven. Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ. But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant: and whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased: and whosoever shall humble himself shall be exalted.*

The Scribes and Pharisees loved and sought external distinctions, uppermost rooms, chief seats in the synagogues, greetings in the markets, and titles of honour. Against this spirit and its consequences, Christ here warns his apostles. As their only final security against the disposition, he forbids *the distinctions and titles* to the acquisition of which its efforts were peculiarly directed. Succeeding ministers are certainly no less interested in being secured against this temptation, danger, and sin, than the apostles were: and what were the means of their safety must be equally necessary, and equally useful, to their followers. Had the assumption of these titles and distinctions been *enjoined upon the apostles;* the injunction would have been pleaded by succeeding ministers, as an ample warrant to themselves for assuming the same titles, and aiming at the same distinctions. To the apostles they were prohibited. Why, according to the same mode of inference, they are not prohibited to succeeding ministers, I confess myself unable to explain.

2. *The fact, that, wherever the officers of the church are mentioned together, no more than two classes are ever mentioned.*

In the former discourse, I made several observations concerning the address of the epistle to the Philippians, which, as specified in the first chapter and first verse, is *to all the saints that are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons.* It will be unnecessary to add any thing here to what was then observed concerning this passage.

In 1 Tim. iii. St. Paul instructs him at large in the qualifications of ecclesiastical officers; and discusses this subject in form, and more extensively, than we find done in any other part of the Scriptures. But even here we find no other officers mentioned, beside the επισκοπος; *bishop,* or *overseer;* and the διακονος, *deacon.* Is it not strange, it

there had been an intermediate officer, distinguished both from the bishop and the deacon, and known by the title of *elder*, that there should be here no mention of such an officer? The character and duties of an elder are on all hands acknowledged to be more important than those of a deacon. Yet these are particularly pointed out; while of those not a hint is given. It is farther to be remarked, that the office and duties of an elder, as distinguished from a bishop, are no where exhibited to us in the New Testament. The text certainly is not such an exhibition. The elders here mentioned were plainly all such, as of right, and by divine authority, exercised the office of a bishop. For this silence on a subject confessedly of serious importance to the church, it is believed no reason can be given.

When certain men came down from Judea to Antioch, and distressed the church in that city by teaching, that *the Gentiles ought to be circumcised in order to their salvation; Paul and Barnabas,* with certain others, *were sent up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question. And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles, and elders. And they declared all things which God had done with them. And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter.* After the deliberation was ended, we are told that *it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch, with Paul and Barnabas. They wrote letters by them after this manner. The apostles, elders, and brethren, send greeting unto the brethren, who are of the Gentiles, in Antioch, and Syria, and Cilicia.* See Acts xv. particularly verses 3, 4. 6. 22, 23.

Concerning this interesting recital I observe,

First. *That the church of Antioch sent their messengers to Jerusalem to obtain a decision concerning a question incomparably more important than any other which agitated the Christian world during the first century.*

Secondly. *Under the immediate instruction of Paul and Barnabas it is impossible that this church should not have known the proper tribunal to which their messengers were to be sent for the purpose of obtaining this decision.*

Thirdly. *They actually sent them to the apostles and elders at Jerusalem.*

Fourthly. *When these messengers were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the whole church, and of the apostles and elders.*

Fifthly. *All the observations made on this occasion were addressed to the body just specified.* The messengers propounded their communications to this body. Peter and James began their speeches, on this occasion, with, *Men and brethren.*

Sixthly. *This body sent chosen men of their own company, authoritatively, with Paul and Barnabas:* viz. *Judas and Silas, chief men among the brethren.*

Seventhly. *The letters, carried by these messengers to Antioch, were written in the name of this body, after this manner; The apostles, and elders, and brethren, send greeting unto the brethren and disciples who are in Antioch,* &c.

Eighthly. *This body decided the question submitted to them; and the Holy Ghost approved of their decision.* Their language is, *Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain who went out from us, have troubled you with words,* &c.; *saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law; to whom we gave no such command. It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you. We have sent therefore Judas and Silas,* &c. *For it seemed good to the* HOLY GHOST, *and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: that ye abstain from meats offered to idols,* &c. The slightest attention will convince any man, that the authoritative determination of the great question concerning circumcision was accomplished, *with the approbation of the Holy Ghost, by the apostles, elders, and brethren: not by the apostles; not by the elders; not by both; not by the brethren; but by the united voice of the whole body.* This the language already recited irresistibly declares.

Ninthly. *There was no bishop in this assembly: that is, in the prelatical sense.* James, whatever was the fact afterward, was not now such a bishop. The letter does not go in his name, nor with any authority whatever attributed to him, except as an apostle, and as a member of that deliberative body: and in neither character any farther, than that he had one voice in the decision of the assembly. As no such bishop or bishops are mentioned in any part of the

transaction; it is impossible that any person possessed of modern episcopal authority should have been present at this meeting.

Tenthly. *This church had at this time existed fifteen or sixteen years; and for about twelve was the only Christian church in the world.* One would suppose it must have been established in the proper Christian order. There were elders in it: and as the number of Christian Jews here amounted to many thousands, it is highly probable that these elders were numerous. The church was also immediately under the eye of the apostles. If prelatical bishops were a part of the Christian economy, I am unable to conjecture why a bishop was not established before this time in Jerusalem. There were also no such bishops in the church at Antioch; nor in those of Syria and Cilicia. *The brethren of the church at Antioch sent the messengers. The letter was addressed to the brethren of the church at Antioch, and Syria, and Cilicia.* Thus I think it clear, that there was not a single such bishop in the Christian church at this period.

3. *Bishops are very little spoken of in the Scriptures.*

There are but seven passages in the Scriptures where bishops are mentioned; the text; Acts xx. 28; Phil. i. 1; 1 Tim. iii. 1, 2; Titus i. 7; 1 Pet. ii. 25. All these have been repeatedly mentioned, except the last, which is thus written. *For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls:* that is, Christ.

In no one of these passages is there the least mention of any distinction between the bishop and the elder, in character, power, authority, duty, or office. On the contrary, the fact, that there were several bishops in Philippi and Ephesus, is a complete proof that there was no prelatical bishop in either of those cities. They were plainly both under the government of a number of *co-ordinate ministers* holding the same office. There is no reason to believe, that other churches were constituted in a different manner.

4. *I illustrate the same truth from the manner in which ministers are spoken of in Titus* i. 5—7. *For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldst set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee. If any be blameless; the husband of one wife;*

having faithful children; not accused of riot, or unruly. For a bishop must be blameless as the steward of God. The reason here given by St. Paul, why Titus should *ordain or constitute elders in every city who should be blameless,* is, *that a bishop must be blameless.*

If a bishop was the same person with an elder; the application and pertinence of this reason will be obvious; but if they were different persons, it seems difficult to conjecture why it should have been assigned. The word *elder* appears to me to be *the proper and peculiar title of the officer;* and the word *bishop,* to be *merely descriptive of one, and that a subordinate one, of his employments;* viz. *overseeing the affairs of the church:* preaching being evidently the supreme employment of a Christian minister. This title, as was formerly observed, was derived from the Jewish economy; and was therefore naturally, and in a sense necessarily, adopted by Jews. Accordingly, it is applied no less than nineteen times in the New Testament to ministers of the church; and most clearly as their usual and appropriate title. In this view of the subject, the passage may be paraphrased in the following manner. "I left thee in Crete to ordain or constitute elders of the church in every city. These officers must be blameless: for men whose duty and business it is to oversee others must themselves be blameless as examples."

But if bishop and elder denote different officers, the passage must be paraphrased in this manner. "I left thee in Crete to constitute elders in every city. These officers must be blameless: for a bishop, a man, an officer, to whom is committed the superintendence of elders, ought to be blameless."

I think this argument cannot be attributed to St. Paul.

Should it be said, that bishops are themselves elders, as well as bishops; and that the apostle has referred to this fact, in the reason which is here given: I answer, that this supposition does not remove the difficulty. The reason given by the apostle, does not depend at all for its force and pertinence, on either the title, or the officer; whether supposed to be mentioned, or alluded to. Its whole force is derived from *the employment* of the elder; and lies in this; that a man who has the oversight of others ought

himself to be blameless; because he ought to be an example to those whom he oversees; and, I presume also, because he ought not to give occasion to any for blaming the ministry of the gospel: just as St. Paul directs the Corinthian elders to give no offence in any thing, that the ministry might not be blamed. Had επισκοπος, in the text under consideration, been rendered as in Acts xx. 28, and as I think it ought plainly to have been rendered here, *overseer;* the soundness of the apostle's reason would have appeared so clearly, as to have prevented most of the debates which the text has occasioned.

With these, which appear to me the only defensible views of this text, I consider it as furnishing immoveable evidence, that a bishop and an elder are the same officer.

I have now mentioned every passage in the Scriptures which I remember where bishops are even glanced at, or the existence of such an order of ministers, as distinguished from elders, is directly countenanced, even in the opinion of its advocates. If the distinction between bishops and elders can be found in the language of Scripture, it is found here. But here no distinction of this nature can be found.

Accordingly, a multitude of episcopalians, both bishops and others, readily acknowledge, that this distinction is not capable of proof from the Scriptures. The following specimens of this acknowledgment will suffice for the present purpose. In a celebrated work, called "The Institution of of a Christian Man," approved expressly by archbishop Cranmer, bishops Jewel, Willett, and Stillingfleet, and the main body of the English clergy, together with *the king* and *parliament,* is this declaration. "In the New Testament there is no mention of any other degrees, but of deacons or ministers, and of presbyters or bishops."

The celebrated Hooker, in his Ecclesiastical Polity, says, "The necessity of polity and regimen in all churches may be believed, without holding any one certain form to be necessary in them all. And the general principles are such, as do not particularly describe any one; but sundry forms of discipline may be equally consistent with the general axioms of Scripture." To this declaration agree bishop Stillingfleet, Dr. Edwards, and others. Dr. Raynolds, pro-

fessor of divinity in Oxford, declares, that "all who had laboured for five hundred years before his time, taught, that all pastors, whether entitled bishops or priests, have equal power and authority by God's word;" and this he declares to be the common judgment of the reformed churches of Switzerland, Savoy, France, Germany, Hungary, Poland, the Netherlands, Scotland, and England. Dr. Holland, king's professor of divinity at Oxford, says, "that to affirm the office of bishop to be different from that of presbyter, and superior to it, is most false; contrary to Scripture, to the fathers, to the doctrines of the church of England, yea, to the very schoolmen themselves."

An act of parliament, passed in the reign of Henry VIII. has the following words. "Archbishops, bishops, archdeacons, and all other ecclesiastical officers, have no manner of jurisdiction ecclesiatical, but by, under, and from, his royal majesty." Accordingly bishop Burnet says, "The king gave bishops their power to ordain or deprive ministers; to exercise ecclesiastical jurisdiction; and perform all other parts of the episcopal function."

To these testimonies, which might be easily swelled to a volume, I shall add only two of modern times.

Archdeacon Paley says, "It cannot be proved that any form of church-government was laid down in the Christian Scriptures, with a view of fixing a constitution for succeeding ages."

The editors of the Christian Observer, in their number for March 1804, say, that "Episcopalians found not the merits of their cause upon any express injunction or delineation of ecclesiastical government in the Scriptures; for there is none."

Thus I think it may be fairly concluded, that the Scriptures have established but two classes of officers in the Christian church; viz. *pastors* and *deacons*.

Having thus examined the scriptural account of this subject, I shall conclude the discourse with a brief investigation *of the testimony given concerning it by the fathers of the church*. As I suppose this testimony to be the chief ground of reliance on the part of those who contend for diocesan bishops; it will be of some importance to examine it on the present occasion.

Concerning this subject I make the following observations.

1. *No testimony from the fathers can give divine authority to any institution whatever.*

The fathers are merely human witnesses, and are to be regarded with no more confidence than other human witnesses of equal credibility. *All things necessary to life and godliness are given to us in the Scriptures.* The testimony of the fathers can therefore add nothing to what is contained in *them;* can set aside nothing; can change nothing.

2. *The testimony of the fathers is far from deserving the credit which is sometimes given to it.* For,

In the first place, *Those who have testified concerning this subject, have given erroneous testimony concerning other things.*

Irenæus testifies, that Linus was made bishop of Rome by Paul and Peter; and after him, Anacletus; and after him, Clement.

Tertullian testifies, that Clement was the *first* bishop of Rome after Peter.

Eusebius declares, that Linus was the first bishop of Rome after the martyrdom of Paul and Peter. Again; that Peter was the first bishop of Antioch. Again; that Euodius was the first bishop of Antioch.

Jerome declares, that Peter sate at Rome twenty-five years, until the last year of Nero. And again, that Ignatius was the third bishop of Antioch after the apostle Peter.

Damascus, bishop of Rome, asserts, that Peter came to Rome in the beginning of Nero's reign; and sate there twenty-five years. Nero reigned but fourteen years; and, according to the united testimony of antiquity, put Peter to death.

Origen says, that he had read in the works of a martyr, that Ignatius was the second bishop of Antioch after Peter.

Epiphanius declares, that both Paul and Peter were bishops of Rome.

These instances prove, that the fathers, however sincere, and however satisfactory their testimony concerning facts which passed under their own eyes, yet received tradition-

ary accounts loosely; and both believed and recorded much of what took place before their time, without truth or evidence.

Secondly. *The works of several of the fathers have been interpolated, corrupted, and partially lost.*

Concerning the epistles of Ignatius, which are peculiarly appealed to in this controversy, Mosheim observes, that he esteems "the authenticity of the epistle to Polycarp to be extremely dubious;" and declares "the question concerning all his Epistles to labour under much obscurity, and to be embarrassed with many difficulties." Where there is so much uncertainty, a safe reliance cannot be placed for the decision of any point not otherwise supported.

3. *The testimony of the fathers does not prove the distinction contended for.*

Even the testimony of Ignatius, were it admitted without a doubt, is alleged in vain for this purpose. The bishop *of whom he speaks,* is the pastor of a single church; the preacher as well as ruler of that church; a man who performed all the duties of an ordinary minister. He exhorts Polycarp to preach; to see that the widows are not neglected; to know all his parishioners, even the men and maid-servants; and to inspect at least every marriage. In his epistle to the church of Magnesia, he speaks also of *their bishops in the plural number.*

Clement of Rome says, "The apostles, knowing by Jesus Christ that contentions would arise about the name or on the account of the episcopate or oversight of the church, constituted bishops and deacons:" the very language of St. Paul in his Epistle to the Philippians. He also uses the names presbyter and bishop, to denote the same officer.

Jerome says, that "A presbyter is the same as a bishop; and that originally the churches were governed by the joint council of the presbyters."

Again; "Let the bishops know, that they are greater than presbyters rather by custom than by the real appointment of the Lord."

And again; "Among the ancients, presbyters and bishops were the same."

Polycarp, in his epistle to the Philippians, says, "Wherefore you must be subject to the presbyters and deacons."

And again; "Let the presbyters be full of piety; merciful to all; bringing back them that wander;" &c. In the view of Polycarp therefore, the presbyters at Philippi did, and were bound to, govern that church.

Tertullian, reciting the ordinances of public worship and the government of the church, says, "In all these things certain approved elders preside."

Irenæus, addressing the heretics of that age, says, "We challenge them to shew *that* tradition which was transmitted from the apostles, by a succession of presbyters." And again; "It behoves us to hearken to those who are presbyters in the church; who, as we have shewn, have their succession from the apostles; who, together with the succession of the episcopate, have received the certain gifts of the truth."

Bishop Stillingfleet, remarking upon this passage, says, "What strange confusion must this raise in any one's mind, who seeks for a succession of episcopal power over presbyters from the apostles by the testimony of Irenæus, when he so plainly attributes both the succession to the presbyters and the episcopacy too of which he speaks."

Firmilian, bishop of Cæsarea, says, "that in elders is vested the power of baptizing, imposition of hands, and ordination."

Hilary says, "The presbyters were at first called bishops."

Theodoret says, "Of old they called the same men both bishops and presbyters."

Finally, Jerome says, that "the presbyters of Alexandria ordained their bishop for more than two hundred years from the first planting of that church."

To these testimonies I shall subjoin a single modern one: that of Mosheim; who says, that "in the first century the rulers of the church were called either presbyters or bishops, which two titles are in the New Testament undoubtedly applied to the same order of men."

From these testimonies it is, if I mistake not, clear, that the principal doctrine maintained in this and the preceding discourse, is the doctrine of the Scriptures concerning the subject in debate.

Another argument, alleged in favour of the distinction against which I contend, *is derived from the character and commission of Timothy and Titus, as exhibited in the epistles* addressed to them by St. Paul.

It is said, that *Timothy was bishop of Ephesus, and Titus of Crete; and that, as such, Paul directed them to ordain elders or presbyters in the churches at Ephesus, and in Crete.*

To this assertion I answer, in the first place, *It cannot be proved, that Timothy was bishop of Ephesus, or Titus bishop of Crete, in any sense; much less in the diocesan sense.*

The Scriptures say this in no place and in no manner whatever. Dr. Whitby, who was a zealous advocate for episcopacy, declares, that he "can find nothing in any writer of the first three centuries, concerning the episcopate of Timothy and Titus, nor any intimation that they bore that name." Indeed he gives up this whole argument in form.

Secondly. *It is certain that Timothy was an evangelist; and therefore not a diocesan bishop, until after the second epistle was written;* because Paul directs him to *do the work of an evangelist* in the fourth chapter of that epistle;* and directs him to come to him at Rome.† An evangelist, as you know, was *an itinerant minister;* and could not be a diocesan bishop, whose business it is to rule, and therefore to abide in his own diocess.

Besides, there were other bishops in Ephesus, when the First Epistle to Timothy was written; *viz.* those whom Paul sent for to Miletus.

The truth unquestionably is, that Paul left him at Ephesus with extraordinary authority as an inspired and eminent preacher, to charge some to *teach no other doctrine than that which he had been taught; nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies.* When this business and other things naturally connected with it were finished, he returned to St. Paul again. What is true of Timothy, is equally true of Titus. He also resided in Crete but a short time before he returned to Paul at Nicopolis; and was, so far as appears, ever settled in Crete at all; certainly not at the time specified in the epistle. And except from the epistle, there is nothing known about the subject.

* 2 Timothy iv. 5. † Ibid. 9.

Thirdly. *Were we to admit, that Timothy and Titus were bishops, and settled at Ephesus and Crete; it cannot be shewn, that they had any other authority than that which all ministers possess, except what was derived from this commission of St. Paul, their superior wisdom and piety, and their inspiration.* Until this can be shewn, the debate concerning this subject can answer no purpose in the present case. But it cannot be shewn.

Another argument for episcopacy is derived from the second and third chapters of the Apocalypse. Here the seven epistles of Christ to the seven churches of Asia are directed, each to *the angel of the church* specified in the epistle. Now it is said, the *angel denotes one minister superior to the rest in authority.* Among these epistles the first is directed to *the angel of the church at Ephesus.* Hence it is argued, that there was one minister in the church at Ephesus; and therefore in the other churches; who was superior to the rest, or, in appropriate language, a bishop. To this I answer,

First; *That granting every thing which can with any pretence be pleaded, the foundation of this argument is too unsolid and uncertain to support any conclusion.*

Secondly. *The word angel is often used in the Apocalypse to denote many.* In these epistles it seems evidently to be thus used; because, in the four first of them, the singular pronoun *thou* is changed into the plural *you;* while the same person is still addressed. Thus Christ says to the angel of the church in Thyatira, *But unto you I say;* Ὑμιν δε λεγω; *and unto the rest in Thyatira.* This being allowed, and it certainly cannot be denied, the argument falls to the ground.

Thirdly. *Should it be acknowledged, that there was but one minister in each of these churches at the close of the first century (the time specified), it will be nothing to the present purpose.*

It is certain, that *there were several bishops in Ephesus at the time when Paul had this church immediately under his direction. These were all constituted bishops by the Holy Ghost. This therefore was certainly an establishment of God.* If then the church at Ephesus, either voluntarily, or from some species of necessity, had changed this institution, it had changed a divine institution; a fact which cannot possibly affect the present question.

Fourthly. *The senior minister in each of these churches may have been the person addressed in these letters.*

It has also been pleaded in behalf of episcopacy, that *there has been an uninterrupted succession of bishops from the apostles to the present time; and that as the apostles received their power from Christ, so the first bishops received theirs from the apostles; and so every succession of bishops received theirs from those who preceded them. In this manner,* it is alleged, *the powers, as well as the officers, have their only proper, legitimate existence at the present time.*

If this argument were now first to be alleged, the author of it would be considered as sporting with his antagonist; for,

First; *This succession is only supposed, and cannot be proved.*

Secondly; *Irenæus declares, that the succession, and together with it the episcopate also, had, down to his day (the latter part of the second century), descended through a series of presbyters, not of bishops.* According to the testimony of this father, the best witness concerning the point in question, the powers now existing in ministers of the church are merely presbyterian; not episcopal.

Thirdly; *Both bishops and presbyters must now trace the succession, if traced at all, through the church of Rome.* There were in this church at one time *four pontiffs, who all denounced each other as usurpers.*

It would be a difficult point to determine through which of these men the powers in question descended to *us*. That any powers of a divine nature passed through such impure hands, will be slowly admitted by a man of piety.

Fourthly; *All that can be pleaded on this subject, can be pleaded by presbyters equally with bishops.*

There is yet another argument which has often been alleged in favour of episcopacy. It is this; that *the Jewish church contained a high-priest, ordinary priests, and Levites; and was a type of the Christian church. The Christian church therefore,* it is concluded, *ought to have three orders of officers: viz. bishops, priests, and deacons.* As the New Testament does not give us a single hint of this nature; it certainly must be trifling to waste the time of my audience in refuting a mere conjecture. I shall only observe therefore, that the Christian church, without the aid of bishops,

is possessed of the three orders contended for. Christ is the great HIGH-PRIEST of our profession; his ministers correspond to the ordinary priests; and the deacons to the Levites.

From all these considerations it is clearly decided, to my apprehension, that diocesan bishops are not of scriptural, but of human origin; introduced either casually, or from considerations of a prudential nature only. Christ has established pastors in his church; the church itself has constituted its bishops; and this to a great extent has been acknowledged by the bishops themselves.

Such clearly appears to me to be the truth concerning this so-much-debated question. Still I have no disposition to contend with those Christians who are attached to episcopacy, and who think they find any peculiar advantages in that form of ecclesiastical administration. Nor can I willingly adopt the severe aspersions sometimes thrown upon it by individual presbyterians. I cannot but remember, and remember with emotions of gratitude and respect, the very great and beneficial exertions made by the English church in the cause of Christianity; and made in many instances by the dignitaries of that church. Butler, Berkeley, Jewel, Beveridge, Bedell, and Wilson, were bishops. Cranmer, Leighton, and Usher, were archbishops. Cranmer, Latimer, and Ridley, were martyrs.

In that church also real religion has at times flourished to a great and very desirable extent. Like other churches, it has had its bright and dark days; but it has undoubtedly sent multitudes of its members to heaven; and at the present time is fast rising in the gradations of piety.

While therefore I claim the common right of judging for myself concerning the subject of this discourse; I freely yield the same right to others. Nor can I take any satisfaction in thinking hardly of them, because they do not adopt my opinions, although, as I think, founded on the Scriptures, concerning ecclesiastical government.

SERMON CLII.

THE EXTRAORDINARY MEANS OF GRACE.

THE END, NATURE, AND SUBJECTS, OF PREACHING.

Go ye therefore, teach all nations.—MATT. XXVIII. 19.

IN the two last discourses I attempted to shew, that *there are but two classes of permanent officers in the Christian church, designated in the Scriptures. One of these classes,* I observed, *is spoken of under the names, elders, pastors, bishops, teachers,* &c.; *and the other under that of deacons.* To the former belongs that which is appropriately called *the ministry of the gospel.*

The next subject of consideration is obviously *the duties of this class of officers.* These I have heretofore mentioned as being, especially, *public and private prayer in the church, preaching the gospel, administering baptism and the Lord's supper, ruling and ordaining other ministers.* These are however far from being the only duties of ministers. There are many others which belong to them *as ministers;* and many more *as men.*

As ministers, they are bound peculiarly to be *examples to believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity;* 1 Tim. iv. 12: *to visit, comfort, instruct, and pray with, the sick and distressed;* James v. 14, &c.: *to study or meditate diligently on the things of the gospel, and give themselves wholly to them, that their profiting may appear to all;* 1 Tim. iv. 15: *to take heed unto themselves and unto their doctrine; and to continue in these things, that in so doing they may both save themselves and those that hear them;* verse 15: *to be apt to teach; to be given to hospitality; to rule well their own houses; to exhibit such good behaviour, as to be well reported of them that are without;* 1 Tim. iii. 2. 4. 7: *and to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints, as being set for the defence of the gospel;* Jude 3; Phil. i. 17. All these, and all other,

ministerial duties may be found most forcibly enjoined in the Scriptures; especially in the epistles of St. Paul to Timothy and Titus.

As a man, a minister is bound to be an eminent example of all the Christian virtues.

Among the official duties of a minister, preaching is undoubtedly of far higher importance than any other. This therefore merits a particular discussion in a system of theology.

Such a discussion I shall now attempt under the following heads.

I. *The end;*
II. *The nature;*
III. *The subjects;* and
IV. *The manner; of preaching.*

I. *I shall briefly examine the end of preaching.*

The end of all preaching is, *to persuade men to become virtuous;* or, in other words, *to persuade them with the heart to believe and obey the gospel.* Cordial obedience to the gospel is virtue in every possible form, and in every instance, on the part of those who are acquainted with the gospel. The end is always of more importance than the means; since it is the only purpose for which the means exist. The end therefore ought ever to direct the nature and employment of the means. The means must be such, and whenever they are chosen by wisdom and goodness will invariably be such, as are suited to the promotion of the end. Whenever they are diverted from this direction, they become useless; and are therefore the mere result and evidence of folly.

The end of preaching is the noblest of all ends; the production of immortal holiness and happiness in the souls of men. In this God has taught us that he is more especially glorified, and more peculiarly pleased, than with any thing else which takes place in the present world. For this end he gave the gospel, and instituted the ministry. For this end he sent his Son to live, and die, and rise again; and his Spirit to renew and sanctify the heart, to support and conduct the soul in the way to heaven.

II. *The nature of preaching may be thus summarily defined: that it is the chief mean of accomplishing this glorious end.*

As a mean to this end, and in this view only, is preaching an object of peculiar importance. Its true and essential nature is, that *it is the chief instrument of salvation.* To this consideration should every direction concerning it be pointed, and every mode of examining it be confined.

That preaching is thus distinguished above all other ministerial duties, I shall now attempt to prove.

1. *The gospel is the great instrument of salvation.*

The law of the Lord, by which, in Rom. ix. 18, St. Paul teaches us the gospel is especially to be understood, *is perfect,* says the Psalmist, *converting the soul. The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart. The fear of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.* Ps. xix. *Quicken thou me,* that is, make me spiritually alive, says the same divine writer, *according to thy word. This is my comfort in my affliction: for thy word hath quickened me:* that is, made me spiritually alive. *The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding to the simple.* Here light and understanding denote holiness. Psalm cxix. 25. 50. 130. *Is not my word like as a fire, saith the Lord, and as a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?* Jerem. xxiii. 19. In describing the effects of *the new covenant,* or *the gospel,* on the Israelites in the latter days, as effectuating their conversion and salvation, God says, *I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts.* This phraseology, I need not observe, is descriptive of their sanctification. Jer. xxxi. 33.

Blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it, says our Saviour, Luke xi. 28.

In Acts ii. 14, viii. 14, xi. 1, and various other places, *receiving the word of God* is mentioned as equivalent to becoming the subjects of holiness. *For I am not ashamed,* says St. Paul, *of the gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.* No declaration can be more ample, comprehensive, or complete, than this. The gospel is not only *the power of God unto salvation,* but is this power *to every one that believeth.*

Rom. i. 16. *So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.* Rom. x. 14. *In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth; the gospel of your salvation.* Eph. i. 13. *The word of God,* says St. Paul, *is quick* (or living), *and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of the soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow; and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.* Heb. iv. 12. *Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth.* James i. 18. *Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.* 1 Pet. i. 23.

I have quoted this numerous train of passages from so many different books in the Scriptures, to shew that this is their universal language.

The doctrine, as you have seen, is expressed in many forms, and in the most decisive manner. It would be easy to swell this list of quotations to an enormous size: but I shall only add to it the following words of Christ. *The truth shall make you free:* John viii. 32: and, *Sanctify them through thy truth, thy word is truth.* John xvii. 17. This is a part of the intercessory prayer of Christ, and has certainly been fulfilled.

2. *The great mean by which the gospel becomes instrumental to salvation, is preaching.*

Of this truth the proof is complete in the words of St. Paul; Rom. xi. 13, 14. 17. *For whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.* In these words the invocation of Christ is exhibited as the ground of salvation; faith, of that invocation; hearing, of that faith; and a preacher, as the indispensable mean of that hearing. From this position it is certain, that preaching is the great mean of salvation: that is the gospel preached by its ministers. It ought to be remembered, that these things are not said of any thing else; particularly of any other ministerial duty. Neither ruling, ordaining, or administering the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's supper, can claim any such effi-

cacy from any scriptural declarations. On these two last subjects, however, I shall dwell more particularly hereafter.

3. *The manner in which preaching is generally spoken of, exhibits its superiority to other ministerial duties.*

Christ mentions preaching as his own great commission from the Father. The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor: Isa. lxi. 1; Luke viii. 14. And accordingly he alleges the fact, that the poor had the gospel preached to them, as proof that he was the Messiah. Matt. xi. 5.

The text shews, that it was *the great commission given by Christ to the apostles and other ministers immediately before his ascension. Go ye, teach all nations* (or make disciples of them by teaching), *baptizing them,* &c.; *teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.* Here they were to make disciples of mankind first; and then to baptize them, and thus to seal their discipleship.

St. Paul mentions it as *the great commission of Christ to him, Rise and stand upon thy feet; for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister, and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee—the Gentiles, unto whom I now send thee, to open their eyes.* Acts xxvi. 16, 17. In the following verse he informs us, that Christ, referring to the same subject, said to Ananias, *Go thy way, for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name to the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel.* Again, Rom. i. 1, *Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God;* that is, *to the preaching of the gospel.*

Again; *But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace to reveal his Son unto me, that I might preach him among the Heathen.*

Preaching is also commanded by St. Paul to the elders of Ephesus, and by St. Peter to those of the countries mentioned in his First Epistle, universally, as their chief duty.

Its importance is in the strongest language placed above *baptism* by St. Paul; 1 Cor. i. 14—17. *I thank God that I*

baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius; lest any should say that I baptized in my own name. And I baptized also the household of Stephanus. Besides, I know not whether I baptized any other: for Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel.

It is decisively preferred to *ruling* in 1 Tim. v. 17. *Let the elders who rule well be accounted worthy of double honour; especially those who labour in the word and doctrine.*

It is also generally preferred to *every other ministerial duty*, by the vast attention paid to it in the Scriptures: being mentioned in about one hundred and forty instances in express language; almost all of them in the New Testament; by the variety of modes in which it is forcibly described, enjoined, and honoured; by the comparatively small attention given in the Scriptures to the other ministerial duties, which are little spoken of, and rarely enjoined; and by the supreme efficacy which it is exhibited as possessing in promoting salvation.

4. *All the other means of grace have neither efficacy nor value, except as they display or impress divine truth.*

The agency of preaching is in this work altogether supreme; and that of other evangelical administrations merely subsidiary. This without them would be powerful and effectual. They without this would hardly have influence or meaning. *Baptism* and *the Lord's supper*, for example, are founded on divine truth; and are manifestations of that truth which possesses great power and most useful efficacy. But to their efficacy or their use, the knowledge of the truth preached is indispensable. Still more are *ruling* and *ordaining* of no use, except as they are subsidiary to preaching. Even *prayer* itself, the prime duty of worship to man as a solitary creature, would have neither meaning nor use antecedently to the knowledge of the truth which is communicated by preaching.

Reading the Scriptures is undoubtedly of more importance to mankind than any thing else beside preaching. The reason is obvious. The truth of God is more extensively learned in this manner, than it can be by all the other ministerial offices; and this truth makes men wise to salvation.

5. *The experience of all Christian ages has furnished ample proof of this position.*

By the preaching of the gospel were all the first converts made by Christ and his apostles; and by the same preaching have all succeeding converts been made in every age and country. *I have begotten you,* says St. Paul to the Corinthians, *through the gospel. Who were born,* says St. Peter, *not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God. Of his own will,* says St. James, *begat he us with the word of truth.* Religion has in this respect been so nearly coextensive with preaching, that where preaching has not been, there has, with scarcely a solitary exception, been no religion; and wherever preaching has existed for any length of time, religion has almost invariably existed also.

But it has been, and may be again, observed, that "all these things were true in ancient times, when Bibles were in few hands, and few persons were able to read. In such times men were in a sense entirely dependant upon preaching for their knowledge of the gospel. But now most persons can read, and can easily obtain Bibles. Preaching therefore, is now of less importance, and less necessary to salvation; because mankind can now come to the knowledge of the truth without this aid."

That the gospel, if read, believed, and obeyed, will make men wise unto salvation, can never be seriously questioned. I will go farther. The reading of the Scriptures is, in my apprehension, after preaching, the chief mean of salvation. This truth however is objected, in the present case, with very little pertinence or success. For,

In the first place, *a great part of mankind are, even now unable to read.* A considerable number of such persons can be found even in the most enlightened countries; and in the Christian world at large not a small majority are in this unhappy situation. To all these preaching is, beyond debate, equally necessary, as to those who lived in the first ages of the church.

Secondly. *Of those who can read, multitudes read the Scriptures, either not at all, or very little.* To these also preaching is absolutely necessary.

Thirdly. *Of those who actually read the Scriptures, mul-*

titudes are very imperfectly able to understand most of what they read.

The necessity of preaching is very great to these also.

Fourthly. *To those who both read and in a good degree understand the Scriptures, preaching is far more interesting and impressive than reading.* The day especially devoted to preaching is the most solemn of all days, the place of all places, the occasion of all occasions. This solemnity is so associated with the preaching of the gospel, that the mind naturally considers this ordinance as furnished with all the importance of these affecting things. Besides the fact, that so many persons are assembled together to worship God, involved in the same guilt and danger, subjects of the same necessities, and obligated to the same duties, awakens in them a powerful sympathy, and gives to preaching a singular importance. We feel, because others around us feel; and instinctively reciprocate the views and emotions which rise in their minds.

Fifthly. *God has promised his blessing peculiarly to the preaching of the gospel.*

A blessing is never connected with any human effort by any law of nature; and cannot be expected from the mere external performance of any duty whatever. It is given, when given at all, as an answer to prayer; and is annexed only to obedience. But we are not warranted to pray for a blessing upon any conduct which is not obedience to a divine institution. In the present case, God has expressly taught us the nature of his institution. *Faith*, says St. Paul, *cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?* To depart from the duty so plainly enjoined in this passage, is to set God at nought, and to squander with the most wanton profusion eternal life. Instead of obtaining a blessing therefore, on the neglect or violation of this duty, we ought to expect those terrible evils, denounced Heb. x. 25—31, against those *who forsake the assembling of themselves together.* No denunciations ought more to alarm us; for they involve judicial blindness here, and eminent perdition hereafter.

Sixthly. *Accordingly, preaching is now, as it ever has been, the great means of promoting salvation.*

I have already observed, that where preaching does not exist, religion is almost never found. I now observe farther, that where persons are not present at the preaching of the gospel, they scarcely ever become religious. Such also is the fact where, although present, they are inattentive and regardless. For proof of these things look at yourselves, and those around you. On the contrary, religion regularly revives and flourishes, wherever the preaching of the gospel is numerously and solemnly attended.

"The pulpit," says the great Christian poet,

> "Must stand acknowledged, while the world shall stand;
> The most important and effectual guard,
> Support, and ornament, of virtue's cause."

From the infancy of the church to the present hour, preaching has more aroused and engaged the attention of mankind, than every thing else which was not miraculous. If you are at a loss concerning this truth, you will easily satisfy yourselves by searching the history of practical and experimental religion. Far more knowledge, and far deeper impressions of religious subjects, have been gained by mankind from this source, than from all other human labours whatever. Nor was any other method ever devised in the present world, so cheap, so convenient, or so effectual, for the purpose of diffusing instruction or reformation.

III. *I shall now consider the subjects of preaching.*

All these are included under one general head; viz. *the gospel.* On this great truth I found the following observations.

1. *As the gospel includes all the subjects of preaching, the preacher is bound to exhibit nothing as a part of the Christian system but what is contained in the gospel.*

The gospel contains *whatever it expresses,* and *whatever it implies:* but it contains nothing more. Nothing more then can be lawfully inculcated by the preacher, as a part of the gospel.

In examining the express declarations of Scripture, *he is bound to give them that sense which the words obviously convey, the current of the context demands, and the circumstances in which they were uttered point out.* Beyond this he can-

not go, without *adding to the words of God*, and exposing himself to *be reproved by him, and found a liar*. This sense he cannot change at all for one which he conceives will better suit and support any part or the whole of a preconceived system; a doctrine of his own philosophy, or a tenet of the church, sect, or party, to which he belongs.

Neither can he lawfully conceal or slur over any thing which in his view the words really contain. Falsehood is as easily propagated by the concealment of truth, as by the utterance of deceit.

With respect to *implications* supposed to be contained in scriptural expressions, *the preacher is bound to see that they are certainly contained*. This usually may be clearly seen wherever the inference is immediate; or when the chain of reasoning which conducts to it is short, and the links are few and obvious. But wherever the inference is doubtful, or the reasoning through which it is derived long and obscure; two qualities which, with respect to this subject, are very generally associated; the preacher is forbidden to make use of it as a part of the word of God, or to exhibit it as being in any sense contained in the Scriptures.

Of inferences from scriptural declarations, I observe universally, that there is usually some, and often great, danger attending them. A man employed in supporting a darling point, will, when hardly pushed, very naturally feel, that as he undoubtedly must be right in his own system, so the Scriptures must somewhere declare that which he at the time wishes to teach. With these views he will naturally hunt for the passages which come nearest to the doctrine in question; and will as naturally believe, that the meaning which he wishes to assign to them is their true meaning. Hence he will attribute to them the implication which he wishes to find. The whole of this process is wrong from the beginning. Every man, particularly every minister, is bound to take up the Bible with a desire and an intention not to find it supporting his own doctrines, but to learn merely what it actually declares; and to conform both his opinions and wishes to its declarations. In this way he may humbly hope to discover the truth; in the other he may be almost assured that he will be left in error.

It is a hard thing for man to believe the Scriptures, and not an easy one for a preacher. Generally he may believe the great doctrines contained in them, and perhaps with no great difficulty. But when particular passages appear to thwart his own opinions, he will ever be in danger of bending them into a conformity to those opinions. His whole soul, on the contrary, ought to be yielded to the dictates of the Scriptures, and humbly to receive whatever God hath spoken. However easy this may seem, it will, unless I am deceived, be found a matter of no small difficulty, even by a man solemnly resolved to carry the design into practice.

Inferences distantly drawn are always to be suspected. Our reasonings, whenever they are complicated, are, even in mathematical cases, exposed to error. A long process in arithmetic, or algebra, or geometry, frequently needs to be reviewed over and over, in order to leave us entirely satisfied that our reasonings are sound. Yet here we have *certain standards of truth;* such as words in most cases cannot become. How much more doubtful are those processes in which *certainty* is at the best rarely attainable. But all the uncertainty which attends the reasonings employed to sustain inferences distantly drawn, attends of course the inferences themselves. On such inferences therefore reliance cannot safely be placed.

On these grounds I protest wholly against a mode of forming sermons, which is said to have gained some reputation in this country: viz. *discoursing on the doctrines or precepts of the text in the morning, and in the afternoon constituting another discourse of inferences professedly derived from them.*

It is unsafe for any man *customarily* to derive two discourses from a single text. At times it may be done with advantage; but it cannot be customarily done even by men of the first talents, unless they would sacrifice the profit of their hearers. Much more will it transcend the power of the great body of preachers. Should they utter nothing but truth, a thing scarcely to be hoped, they will not fail either to be weak, and on this account unprofitable, or to make their discourses disgusting by numerous and very tedious repetitions.

This however is not the worst effect of the practice. If

contrary to all probability, they should be entirely successful, and speak nothing but truth and good sense, their sermons in the afternoon would always be liable to this radical evil; that the truth which they contain being merely a collection of inferences, and not expressly declared in the Scriptures, nor clearly understood by the hearers, would be questioned, doubted, and soon denied. The character of the preacher in the mean time would dwindle from that of *an evangelical minister*, into that of *a merely ingenious man*. His sermons also, instead of convincing and reforming his hearers, would only amuse and entertain them. Even near and obvious inferences have less weight than direct scriptural declarations; while distant ones have scarcely any weight at all.

But why should sermons be written in this manner? Certainly the Scriptures are sufficiently copious, and sufficiently various, to furnish the preacher with all necessary materials, without forcing him to form them of his own deductions. Why should the plain declarations of God be exchanged for the doubtful inferences of man? Is it because God has not directly disclosed the proper subjects of preaching? This will not be said. I trust it will not be believed. I confess myself therefore at a loss for the reason, unless it is to be found in the restless desire of exhibiting something which is new.

2. *As the gospel is to be preached, so it is all to be preached.*

In the strict sense, I acknowledge this is not practicable. The Bible is a world; and is enriched with a variety and abundance suited to a world. The life of an antediluvian preacher would furnish an opportunity of exhausting but a little part of its stores. But the capital doctrines and precepts may all be insisted on by every preacher during a ministry of no uncommon length. It is here intended that all these should be brought into the desk freely; fully; without partiality; without reluctance. It is also intended that no doctrine, and no precept, and no fact, shall be omitted by the preacher on account of any disrelish with which it may be regarded by his mind, or, as he may apprehend, by the minds of his hearers. "*All Scripture*, says St. Paul to Timothy, *is given by inspiration of God; and is profita-*

ble for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished to every good work.—I charge thee before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom, preach the word: be instant in season; out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and doctrine. Here St. Paul charges Timothy, *before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, to preach the word;* that is, the whole word; as will be evident from the connexion between this charge and the reasons on which it is founded, given in the verses immediately preceding. These reasons are of the highest possible import. *All Scripture,* says St. Paul, *is given by inspiration of God.* All is therefore exactly true, supremely wise, and absolutely right; and is invested with divine authority, requiring the minister to preach it, and the congregation to hear. *All Scripture,* he adds, *is* also *profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness.* The end of all is, *that the man of God may become perfect, and thoroughly furnished to every good work.* With these reasons before him, who can doubt that all Scripture is to be preached?

There have been, there probably still are, many preachers by whom this plain rule of duty has been not a little disregarded; that is, if their practice may be allowed to interpret their sentiments.

Some preachers insist only, or almost only, on those which are called *the moral duties of mankind:* viz. those duties which immediately respect ourselves and our fellow-men; such as justice, temperance, truth, kindness, candour, almsgiving, and others of the like nature.

Others discuss only or chiefly the duties of piety; or those which immediately respect God.

Some preachers deliver little or nothing from the desk, except that which is fitted to alarm and terrify their hearers.

Others dwell continually and only upon those parts of the gospel which are calculated to soothe and comfort.

Some shun every thing which is unpopular; and utter only *smooth things;* such as they expect to be relished by their hearers; and satisfy themselves with the belief, that

their congregations will receive nothing else, and that therefore nothing else will be useful to them. Yet St. Paul declared to the elders of Ephesus, that he *had not shunned to declare to them all the counsel of God:* and God said to Ezekiel, *Go, and speak unto the children of thy people; and tell them, Thus saith the Lord God; whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear.*

Others appear pleased to excite, and form their discourses in such a manner as to excite, a hostility to truth, even beyond that which is natural to man. Yet it is recorded of him who is styled in the Scriptures *the Preacher,* that *he sought to find out acceptable words.*

Some preachers, who dwell upon *the law,* exhibit it not only as *the rule of our duty,* but *as the ground of our justification.*

Others leave the law chiefly or wholly out of their discourses, even as a rule of obedience.

To all these and other similar modes of preaching, equally contrary to reason and revelation, I oppose, both as a refutation and a censure, the charge of St. Paul to Timothy, cited above, and the solemn reasons by which it is enforced. Man cannot call in question the importance, or the usefulness, any more than the truth, of the word of God. Whatever he has been pleased to reveal is useful to mankind; and is to be received by them with reverential and grateful acknowledgments. It is to be believed: it is to be obeyed: it is to be employed to accomplish the very ends for which it was revealed.

All Scripture, says St. Paul, *is profitable.* Let me subjoin, that we cannot tell, with any certainty, what particular doctrine, precept, or fact, will be most profitable; that is, on a given occasion. Often, very often, ministers have found those discourses most useful to their hearers, from which they had scarcely cherished any hopes.

3. *A preacher is bound to give to each subject that degree of place and importance which is given to it by the Scriptures.*

This rule, I am aware, can only be followed *generally.* In a case so imperfectly definite, exactness of conformity is evidently unattainable, and, happily for us, unnecessary.

But a general conformity to it is sufficiently easy, and obviously our duty.

On some subjects the Scriptures dwell abundantly; exhibiting them always as primary parts of the system of truth and duty which they contain. Others they plainly present to us as comparatively of little importance. *Judgment, mercy, and faith*, are *weightier matters of the law:* while, compared with these, *tithing mint, anise, and cummin*, is of little consequence. When it is said, *Except ye repent, ye shall all perish; Without faith it is impossible to please God; Without holiness no man shall see the Lord;* it is impossible for us not to perceive, that faith, repentance, and holiness, are of supreme importance to man. But the observance or nonobservance of one day above another (I refer not here to the sabbath), modes of worship, and many other things of a similar nature, are plainly of very inferior consequence. The manner in which these subjects are respectively exhibited in the Scriptures, furnishes ample proof that these observations are just.

The Scriptures themselves are a perfect pattern of the time, care, and pains, which the preacher is to bestow on the respective subjects of his discourses in all ordinary circumstances. That on which *they* lay the greatest stress, is most to engross his attention and his sermons. That on which they lay the least stress, is least to be dwelt upon by him.

I say, *this is to be done in ordinary circumstances.* But there are peculiar occasions, frequently occurring, which demand his peculiar attention. His hearers may be especially addicted to some particular sins, or in especial danger from particular errors; or may peculiarly need to be taught certain truths, or urged to certain acts of duty. These will then require his peculiar efforts: and for such efforts, in such cases, he will find an ample warrant in the Scriptures. Timothy and Titus were expressly commanded to inculcate particular things in a peculiar degree, because they were peculiarly necessary. Ministers are directed to *contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints;* and are said to be *set for the defence of the gospel.* They are, therefore, required to defend those parts of it most

frequently, as well as most strenuously, which are most questioned; and to oppose with the greatest vigour those errors from which their hearers are in the greatest danger. In this manner Christ preached; in this manner preached the prophets and the apostles: steadily directing their discourses to the occasions which gave them birth. This is indeed the plain dictate of common sense; and, with these warrants, will be certainly, as well as safely, followed by every wise and faithful minister.

The Bible is written in a manner perfectly fitted to produce the best effects on the moral state of man. The preacher who follows closely this divine example, may therefore rationally hope to produce the best moral effects on his hearers. On the contrary, he who wanders from it ought, while he censures himself deeply for his disrespect to this perfect pattern, to believe, that he shall find little consolation in the fruits of his preaching. In vain will he plead, that, in his view, some other mode will be better suited to the wants of his hearers. In vain will he *think himself wise above that which is written.* In vain will he plead the nature and influence of any doctrines, or precepts, as viewed by his own judgment. God, who knew the nature of all precepts and doctrines, has written such of them in the Scriptures, and in such a manner, as his own wisdom determined to be best for man. Unless the preacher therefore thinks himself wiser than God, he must perceive his opinion to be wholly out of place, unfounded, and unhappy.

To the law, and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them. This sentence is equally applicable to the parts as to the whole of this word; and precisely just with respect to their importance and influence, as well as to their truth. In both respects the scriptural exhibition is perfect. He who copies it, and he only, will do the most good in his power.

SERMON CLIII.

THE EXTRAORDINARY MEANS OF GRACE.

THE MANNER OF PREACHING.

Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations.—MATT. XXVIII. 19.

FROM these words I proposed, in the preceding discourse, to examine,

I. *The end;*

II. *The nature;*

III. *The subjects;* and

IV. *The manner; of preaching.*

The three first of these heads I discussed at that time; and shall now go on to consider the

IV. Viz. *The manner of preaching.*

It is not enough, that sermons contain the truth; important and indispensable as this is. A sermon may contain evangelical truth, and that only; and yet may exhibit it in such a manner, as to prevent a great part of its proper efficacy. Nor does the evil always stop here. Instances have existed in the world, and that not very unfrequently, in which preachers have uttered nothing but what was strictly evangelical, and yet have only amused, wearied, or disgusted, sober, patient, and candid hearers. The manner therefore in which truth is preached, may possess an importance which it would be difficult to estimate.

The views which I have formed of this subject may be exhibited under the following heads.

1. *The gospel ought ever to be preached plainly; so as to be clearly and easily understood by those who hear.*

St. Paul, in 1 Cor. xiv. 19, says, *I would rather speak five words with my understanding, that with my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue.* From the conclusion of this passage,

and the general tenor of his reasoning in this chapter, it is evident, that to speak with the understanding denotes, to speak that which would be understood, not by himself only, but by those who heard him. This, he informs us, was of more value in his estimation than the supernatural power of speaking with tongues, however coveted, and however splendid an endowment.

With St. Paul's opinion, common sense exactly harmonizes. To teach is to communicate knowledge. But the teacher who is not understood communicates nothing.

Plainness of preaching involves *perspicuity and precision of language;* and, indeed, *purity and propriety also.* Our words ought to be English, and to be used as they are customarily used. They ought also to express that, and that only, which we intend, and to express it clearly. All this, as you know, is necessary to writing and speaking well generally. *Peculiarly* is it necessary, when we address popular assemblies; a great part of whom are accustomed to plain language only; and *supremely,* when we utter the doctrines and precepts of the gospel, infinitely important as the means of eternal life.

Our phraseology ought carefully to be cleared of all ambiguities; the effect of which is only to perplex those who hear. If these are admitted into sermons through carelessness, the preacher is inexcusable; if through doubt in his mind, he is bound to say nothing concerning the subjects of his doubts, unless when compelled to acknowledge them to his audience.

Technical or *scientifical language* is also to be excluded from popular sermons. This may sometimes serve to shew the learning of the preacher; but will prevent his sermons from being useful to his audience.

A still greater trespass against plainness of speech, and much more common in the desk, is committed in what is called *metaphysical preaching.* The science of metaphysics, as you well know, is that which is employed about *the nature of things.* As this subject is peculiarly abstruse, and demands nice and difficult disquisition, all discussions which are nice and difficult are familiarly termed metaphysical. Most young preachers are fond of metaphysical subjects; and, be the subject almost what it may,

of the metaphysical mode of discussion. Nor are young preachers alone in these respects.

All preaching of this nature is however chiefly useless, and commonly mischievous. No ordinary congregation ever understood, to any valuable purpose, metaphysical subjects; and no congregation, it is believed, was ever much edified by a metaphysical manner of discussion Whenever distinctions become subtile and nice, they cease to be made by the common mind; and, however clear the preacher's views may be, they will never, in this case, become the views of his audience. After attempting for a while to follow him in his ingenious career, and finding themselves unable, they will give up the attempt in despair and disgust.

Happily, the duty of the preacher, and the interest of his congregation, do not demand this mode of preaching. Few theological subjects ordinarily require discussions of this nature: and none of them, unless on rare and peculiar occasions, require them in the desk. The obvious investigations of common sense are incomparably better fitted to popular audiences. Common sense, the most valuable faculty (if I may call it such) of man, finds all its premises either in revelation or in facts; adopts arguments only of the *a posteriori* kind; extends its reasonings through a few steps only: derives its illustrations from familiar sources; discriminates only where there is a real difference; and admits conclusions only where it can see their connexion with the premises. At theoretical philosophy it laughs. Theoretical divinity it detests. To this faculty the Scriptures are almost universally addressed. The subjects which they contain are, to a considerable extent, metaphysical; and often so abstruse, as to defy human investigation. Yet they are almost always treated in the obvious manner of common sense. Even St. Paul, one of the most profound of all reasoners, never appears to choose abstruse discussion, when the subject will allow of any other; and returns with apparent pleasure to a plainer mode of discourse, as soon as the nature of the case will permit. Our Saviour treats every subject in the direct manner of common sense, although he often discourses concerning things of the most profound nature.

There is another evil in the metaphysical mode of disquisition, which ought, in most instances, to discourage us from attempting it. It is this. The preacher himself is apt to be bewildered by the abstruse nature of his subject, and by the tenuous, subtile, manner of his reasoning; and is often very far from possessing clear views of either. Men devoted to literary inquiries are frequently ambitious of metaphysical fame. Abstruse reasonings, curious speculations, especially when they are their own, and, still more, discoveries made in this profound science by themselves, when they are supposed to be new, are regarded by them with peculiar favouritism and fondness. Attempts of this nature are therefore made by multitudes, both philosophers and divines. But of all those which have been made, few, very few, have been successful. Almost all have, at the best, been only ingenious amusements; and far the greatest part have fallen short even of this character. Whatever applause or credit they have gained, has usually been momentary. Of utility, almost all have been totally destitute, and have accordingly soon vanished from the attention of mankind. Aquinus and Duns-Scotus, men scarcely inferior to any metaphysicians, and once more celebrated than any writer of the present day, are now known almost solely by their names. How evident is it therefore, that men possessed only of the common talents, such as those of almost all men, and, still more, men of moderate information, were never designed by God to be useful as metaphysicians. Generally, therefore, clergymen cannot be wisely employed in often uttering discussions of this nature from the desk.

At the same time, every subject of preaching ought, so far as the purpose in view requires, to be thoroughly discussed. Subjects indeed which are plain, and doctrines which are acknowledged, demand often very little discussion. If they are exhibited with clear arrangement, and with brief and distinct evidence, nothing more will usually be necessary. At times, it will be proper to mark the connexion between the subject in hand, and others intimately related to it, that their harmony may be understood. But whenever doctrines are less clear, or more disputed, greater pains will always be necessary to exhibit their evi-

dence, and evince their truth. If the preacher has formed clear and comprehensive views of them himself, he cannot be at a loss for useful modes of presenting them to others. That view of them which is most satisfactory to himself, will almost always best satisfy others. Diligent study, precision of thought, and habitual clearness of arrangement, will regularly qualify him for this part of his business.

2. *The gospel ought to be preached variously.*

By this I intend, that both the manner, and especially the subjects, of preaching, should be diversified.

The foundation of preaching in this manner is laid in the nature of man, and in the nature of divine truth. The love of variety is one of the elementary principles of human nature; and seems to have been implanted in the heart, that we might be always and irresistibly allured to the study and the relish of the infinitely various works of God. These are formed with unceasing variety, that they might display the boundless diversity of his wisdom and goodness. That man may understand them, it is absolutely necessary that he study them; and to the study of them, the love of their nature and appearance is indispensable. Hence this principle in the human constitution; a principle never to be forgotten by a preacher.

Divine truth, which is an account of the works and character of God, is possessed, as it necessarily must be, of a corresponding variety. All the parts of which this truth is composed, are declared to *be profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness.* The profit of the whole is made up of that which is furnished by the several parts; and, to be either communicated or gained must be derived from them all. All therefore should, so far as may be, find their proper place in the successive discourse of the preacher.

Besides, a great part of the beauty, excellence, and usefulness, of evangelical doctrines and precepts, results from their mutual relations, seen only by comparing them with each other. Faith, justification, and holiness, for example, have an import, a beauty, a distinction, arising from their connexion with each other, which we should in vain attempt to find by a separate investigation. But unless all

these, and many other doctrines, are exhibited by the preacher, this connexion can never be learned by his hearers.

Of this variety of preaching, in both respects, the Scriptures are an abundant example. In them we find an immense diversity of truths, communicated in a delightful diversity of manner. Here we are furnished with profound reasonings; short, prudential, moral, and religious, maxims; plain and pithy precepts; orations in form; poetry of every species, and every high degree of excellence; familiar letters; private journals; history, both general and biographical; together with most other approved modes of communication. At the same time, each writer has adopted his own peculiar manner, both in prose and poetry; and thus, while furnishing a strong presumption that the writings are genuine, has added not a little to the beauty of the sacred volume. By these various methods of communication, the understanding is addressed with the highest advantage; the imagination is powerfully allured; and the feelings of the heart are irresistibly engrossed. Hence the Bible is more bought and more read than any other book. Hence also man is summoned with peculiar success to the great business of repentance and reformation. The wisdom and goodness of God, manifested in this interesting structure of the sacred volume, can never be sufficiently admired.

By this happy method of communicating divine truth, the Scriptures are rendered also the most comprehensive of all writings. They are indeed pre-eminently comprehensive by their conciseness. In addition to this, they possess that character in a far higher degree by means of their perpetually diversified manner of communication. From this source the same truths are presented to us in lights unceasingly new; and with connexions surprising the mind on every successive page. Hence, by an examination and comparison of different passages, new truths, not directly declared, are unfolded with absolute clearness, and indubitable certainty. The number of these truths is incomprehensible.

This extraordinary variety of manner cannot, I acknowledge, be adopted by a preacher. Still it authorizes, and

in my view requires, him to diversify his discourses in every mode which is warranted by correct taste, so far as it shall be in his power. Preaching is in its nature an address to a popular assembly; and can therefore admit of no other varieties of manner than those which are applicable to such an address. But even these may be considerably numerous. Such an address, from the example of the apostles and succeeding ministers, may be warrantably distributed under two great heads: *preaching, in the proper sense,* and *commenting.* The former of these is naturally the most interesting; the latter, perhaps, the most instructive. In the course of it, many doctrines may be illustrated, and many parts of Scripture explained and enforced, which the preacher can never even introduce into sermons. Difficulties also, which may perplex the common mind, may in this manner be removed; seeming discordances reconciled; connexions and other relations illustrated; and harmony displayed; more advantageously than in any other manner. On all these accounts it will engage, as well as improve; and, as a part of every course of preaching, will render the whole course more interesting than perhaps it could be otherwise.

In both modes the preacher will increase that variety of communication, which will be both useful and pleasant, *by adopting invariably his own characteristical manner.* Every man is formed to think, speak, and write, in a manner peculiar to himself. This being contrived by the divine wisdom, is naturally fitted to be both agreeable and useful; and ought always to be retained. *It may, it ought to be, improved,* so far as our circumstances will allow; *but it cannot be safely exchanged for that of any other individual; nor, without serious disadvantage, for a general mode, established by common consent.* It is the tendency of all criticism to form rules so narrow, as to limit the natural, proper, and pleasing excursions of the human mind. Men oftener write with vigour and success, when they forget, disregard, or are ignorant of, the encumbrance of these rules, than when they are timorously governed by them. I do not deny, that, as they are now adopted by enlightened men, they are generally just, and will serve well for the purposes of enabling us to judge of what is already written, and to

avoid blemishes and absurdities in writing. But they never can teach, and very frequently prevent, that excellence in writing of which we are capable. To avoid this evil, and to make the most of his powers, every preacher, after possessing himself of the general manner, should, with so much conformity to it as to save himself from just censure, adopt his own manner, improved as much as may be, but never relinquished nor destroyed. This will enable him to differ, usefully and pleasingly only, from other preachers; and will give to his discourses most of that novelty of which sermons are now susceptible. At the same time, he will always appear in it with more advantage than in any other; and will add extensively to that diversity of communication which I have urged in both these kinds of discourse. Should any person apprehend, that the general mode in use must be exactly followed; I answer, that very different modes have been acceptable, and useful, in other ages, and other countries; and that human nature furnishes no satisfactory proof that they may not be useful again.

As to variety of subjects, the preacher can never be at a loss; and must be inexcusable, if he does not avail himself of this advantage. The Bible is a world; and all that it contains is proffered to his use. Every thing which it contains *is* also *profitable for instruction.*

It will be in vain for a preacher to allege, that, in his view, some subjects are sufficiently important to claim the whole attention both of himself and his hearers. As I remarked in the preceding discourse, the comparative importance of doctrines is settled by the Scriptures themselves. Them he is bound to follow. Should he then determine, that it is proper for him to preach only on alarming themes, that sinners may be compelled to lay hold on eternal life; or should he judge, that they are only to be *allured* by the mercy of God, the love of the Redeemer, and the benevolent offers of life made in the gospel; he judges erroneously. The proof is, God has thought otherwise. Should he choose to dwell only on the duties immediately owed to God; or on those which immediately respect men; he seriously mistakes his proper business: for God has required and inculcated both. If, in a word, he selects any favourite subject, or class of subjects; he

does what the Scriptures no where justify, and abundantly condemn.

In the mean time, let every preacher who frequently handles one, or customarily handles a few subjects, in his sermons, and, as will always be the fact, handles them substantially in one manner, remember, that this monotony will soon become wearisome to his hearers, and in a great measure rob him of the power of doing them good. What he says may be true. It may be pleasing; it may be edifying. But reiteration will soon render it disgusting, and useless. For this fault nothing will atone. Common sense is against him. Human nature is against him. The Scriptures are against him. In vain, therefore, will he search for an excuse.

3. *The gospel ought to be preached boldly.*

He who brings a message from God, ought never to be afraid of man. He ought to remember the authority, the commands, and the presence, of his Master; and his own duty and accountableness. He ought to remember, that, if he deliver his message faithfully, he will be accepted; if not, he will be condemned. Nor ought he any more to forget, that, in the former case, he will in all probability promote the salvation of his flock; and, in the latter, conduct them only to destruction.

To faithfulness, boldness is indispensable. *The fear of man* always *bringeth a snare.* Equally dangerous is it to *love the praise of men.* Independence of both is absolutely necessary to integrity. No specimens of pungent, intrepid address to the consciences of men, or of undaunted reproof for their sins, are more vivid and glowing than those of our Saviour to the Jews, and especially to the Pharisees. Of Paul it is very frequently recorded, that *he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus.* He also directs the Ephesians to *pray always with all prayer, that he might speak boldly, as he ought to speak.* Similar things are recorded of Barnabas and Apollos. The discourses of Paul, Peter, and Stephen, recorded in the Acts, are also illustrious specimens of this noble and upright independence of character. What preacher will hesitate to obey such authority, and to follow such examples!

With his duty will ever be combined his immediate in-

terest. In so solemn a case as this, peace and self-approbation can never be possessed by him who does not, without reserve or palliation, without fear or flattery, declare *the truth, as it is in Jesus.* At the same time, he will sink in the estimation of his flock. Every discerning man, nay, every man of common sense, will soon suspect both his integrity and his piety; and will regard him as a time-server, unfaithful to God, and interested only for himself. A minister labouring under these imputations, will neither be trusted nor respected. Even those who love *the smooth things* which he utters, will despise him for uttering them.

The bold, independent, honest preacher will, on the contrary, be naturally and highly esteemed by his people; even by those who smart under the censures which he directs against their sins, and tremble at the alarm which he sounds in their ears concerning their future destiny. At the same time, he will enjoy the consolation of knowing, that he has faithfully laboured to discharge his duty; to promote the glory of his Maker, and the salvation of his flock, and to keep himself *clear from the blood of all men.* On a dying-bed he will be able to say, and find unspeakable hope in saying, with St. Paul, *I have not shunned to declare the whole counsel of God, and have kept back nothing which was profitable to my people.*

4. *The gospel ought to be preached solemnly.*

All things pertaining to divine truth, are eminently solemn. Such are its *Author,* and its *end;* the manner in which it is communicated; the miracles with which it was ushered into the world; the Redeemer by whom it was disclosed; and the wonderful expense by which it came to mankind. Of the same nature are the subjects about which it is employed. Nothing ever appeared to the human mind of such import as the character and actions of God; the excellences of the Redeemer; the amazing work of redemption; the depravity and condemnation of men; the glorious exercise of mercy to our race; the renovation of the soul; the importance of life and death, of judgment and eternity, of heaven and hell.

In these things is involved our all. How then can a preacher, commissioned by God to declare them to his fellow-men, fail to realize their immense importance and

amazing solemnity! How can he fail of declaring them with a corresponding solemnity to his flock!

> "He that negotiates between God and man,
> As God's ambassador, the grand concerns
> Of judgment and of mercy, should beware
> Of lightness in his speech. 'Tis pitiful
> To court a grin, when you should woo a soul;
> To break a jest, when pity would inspire
> Pathetic exhortation; and t' address
> The skittish fancy with facetious tales,
> When sent with God's commission to the heart."

If the nature of these subjects be duly considered; if their importance be duly felt; it will be impossible for the preacher to fail of exhibiting them to his hearers with the deepest solemnity. Lightness of manner is always generated by lightness of mind. He who adopts it in the desk, has forgotten that his discourse is professedly derived from the Bible, employed about God, and directed to eternity.

A trespass against this manner of preaching, not unfrequent, and highly reprehensible, is a mode sometimes termed *theatrical*. It may be thus described. The preacher, if we may be allowed to judge from the result, sits down to write as finished a composition, and enters the desk to speak it as gracefully, as he can. His commanding object is to please, to excite admiration, and to gain applause. His proper business is forgotten. This is to awaken, convince, and save, his flock. He has carved out for himself a new employment, of which the Scriptures know nothing. This is to exhibit himself to advantage. Instead therefore of the plain, bold, and solemn address, with which divine truth is instinctively preached, the audience is amused with a combination of brilliant images and pathetic effusions, intended merely to excite admiration. To increase this effect, they are presented to the audience with such efforts of utterance and gesture, as are usually exhibited on the stage. In truth, the desk is here changed for the time into a stage; and the preacher, laying aside his own character, puts on that of an actor. Like other actors, he intends merely to please those who hear him. Their souls and their salvation, his own character, duty, and final account,

he has forgotten. He has forgotten his Bible, he has forgotten his God.

The most solemn, the best sermons may be, they usually are, marked with strong images, bold figurative language, and affecting addresses to the heart. The whole energy of the mind is poured out in them by the preacher. But in such sermons all these things are adventitious. They grow spontaneously out of the solemn and most affecting nature of the subject, the preacher's deep sense of its vast importance, and his earnest desire that his audience may feel it, as it is felt by himself. Here the subject is the only thing which is prominent. The preacher is in a great measure forgotten both by himself and his hearers. In the mode which I have reprehended, the preacher is the only conspicuous figure; while the diminutive subject is faintly sketched and scarcely seen in the back ground of the picture.

5. *The gospel ought to be preached earnestly.*

Every thing which is felt by the mind to be deeply interesting, either to its own welfare or to that of its fellow-men, is by the mere prompting of nature expressed with earnestness, both in writing and speaking. So universally true and so obvious is this, that he who does not thus express himself in this manner, is never supposed to be interested at all. Accordingly, men who wish to persuade others that they feel when they do not, are obliged to counterfeit this mode of nature, that they may thus be believed to feel. Hence all the assumed fervour of demagogues, separatical preachers, and others of a corresponding character.

From this fact it is abundantly evident, that he who would persuade others that he is interested in the subjects on which he descants, must originally feel them; and must also express his views of them in the native language of feeling. To a preacher, these rules are important in a degree which it will be difficult to estimate. The observance of them is necessary to convince his hearers that he is an honest man. The truths of the gospel are of such moment as to render it impossible for him who cordially believes them to avoid being deeply interested; and, if thus interested, very difficult to fail of discovering that interest by the earnestness of thought and utterance in which it is naturally expressed. But a preacher of the gospel, unless he

prove the fact to be otherwise, is originally supposed to be deeply interested in its truths; and is regularly considered as professing by his very office cordially to believe them. If then he brings them forth to his congregation in a combination of cold sentiments, lifeless phraseology, and languid elocution; it will not be easy for *them* to be satisfied, that he feels what he professes to feel, or believes what he professes to believe.

Should he however escape this imputation, and by a life of exemplary piety and beneficence prove himself to be a good man; a case which I acknowledge has frequently existed; his preaching will, to a great extent, be still unhappy. If from the force of a phlegmatic constitution, or a habit of moving heavily in the concerns of life, he should have derived a dull, drawling mode of thinking, writing, and speaking, he will spread a similar languor over his hearers; and lull their moral powers, if not their natural ones, to sleep. They may believe him to be sincere; but they will never feel as if he were in earnest. From such preaching, no energy of affection, no solemn concern, no active fears, no lively hopes, no vigorous resolutions, no strenuous efforts about the salvation of the soul, can be ordinarily derived; and certainly can never be rationally expected.

He, on the contrary, who exhibits the doctrines and precepts of the gospel in an earnest, fervid manner, will instinctively be regarded as being really in earnest. Religion from his mouth will appear as a concern of high moment; a subject in which every man is deeply interested, about which he is obliged to employ the most solemn thoughts, and the most efficacious exertions. All who attend on his ministry will go to inquire, to listen, to feel, to act, and to be fervently employed in practising their duty, and obtaining their salvation.

Let no young preacher think himself excused, for a moment, in neglecting to acquire such a manner of preaching. Every preacher is bound to use all the means in his power for the purpose of rousing the attention and engaging the affections of his flock to these mighty objects. Much more at the same time is in his power than he will easily believe. A too modest distrust of their own talents in this respect is perhaps the chief reason why the eloquence of the desk is,

in so many instances, less earnest, less animated, than a good man would always wish. All men will acknowledge this to be unhappy: often there is reason to fear, it is criminal also. For he who has not laboured as much as is in his power to preach well in this respect, has certainly not laboured to preach as well as he can.

Young men have a peculiar interest in this subject. A preacher, who is unanimated in youth, will be heavy in middle life, and torpid in old age.

I know of no class of preachers, so prone to be defective in this particular, as those who are sometimes called *moral preachers*. By these I intend such as inculcate, not the morality of the gospel, but such a course of external conduct, as merely secures a fair reputation, and renders the state of society agreeable; in other words, *the morality of Zeno and Seneca*. It is impossible that he who recommends this morality, and stops here, should be in earnest himself, or appear earnest to others.

6. *The gospel ought to be preached affectionately.*

No employment awakens and calls into action all the generous emotions of the mind more than that of the preacher. He comes to his fellow-men with a message infinitely more interesting and more useful than any other. He is sent on an errand more expressive of tenderness and good-will. He comes to disclose the boundless mercy of God to mankind, as manifested in the condescension, life, and death, of the Redeemer; in the forgiveness of sin, and the renovation of the soul; in its safe conveyance through the dangers of this world, and its final admission into heaven. This message he brings to his fellow-men, guilty and ruined in themselves, exposed to infinite danger and hopeless suffering. What subjects can be equally affecting? What employment can equally awaken all the tenderness of virtue?

An affectionate manner is in itself amiable and engaging. Men naturally love those who appear benevolent and tender-hearted; and, most of all, require and love this character in a minister of the gospel. This character, or its opposite, can hardly fail to appear in his discourses. There are so many things in the subjects of his preaching which naturally call forth tenderness and affection, that if he possess this disposition, it cannot fail to appear in his senti-

ments, in his language, and in his manner of utterance. Wherever it appears, it will be acknowledged and loved; and the words of a beloved preacher will always come to his flock with a peculiar power of persuasion.

There is one class of scriptural subjects about which I wish especially to warn those of my audience who may one day become preachers of the gospel. This class involves all those which respect the anger of God against sin, and his denunciations against sinners: particularly the final judgment and retribution, and the future sufferings of the impenitent. It is no unfrequent thing to hear these subjects discussed in that strong language, and that vehement utterance, with which an impassioned speaker labours to express his own indignation, and to rouse that of his audience against atrocious crimes, or invading enemies. Vehemence is not the manner of address which is suited to subjects of this nature. The preacher ought to remember, that in disclosing the doom of the impenitent, he *is* perhaps pronouncing his own. How few, even of the best men, are *assured* of their safety! Were this objection removed, how foreign, how unfitted (to say the least), is it to subjects so awful! I have heard sermons of this description. The emotions excited in my own mind, and abundantly expressed to me by others, were, I confess, a mixture of horror and disgust; feelings from which good can hardly be expected in a case of this nature. I wish these subjects ever to be handled plainly and without disguise. Such a mode is equally essential to the integrity of the preacher, and the usefulness of his discourses. But I wish them to be always handled also with such a mixture of solemnity and affection, as shall wholly exclude vehemence on the one hand, and strongly exhibit tenderness on the other. The words of the preacher should be those of a guilty man to guilty men; or a dying man to dying men; of a man who humbly hopes, that he has found pardon for himself, and is most affectionately anxious that his hearers may find the same blessing also.

There are two other subjects which I think are often improperly handled in a different manner: a manner which without much violence may be styled *too affectionate;* viz. the love and the sufferings of Christ. These, many preachers

labour to describe with as much strength and tenderness as possible. In their efforts to be particularly pathetic, they often exhibit such images, and adopt such expressions, as have ever appeared to me unsuited to the nature and dignity of the theme. The love of Christ was wonderful in its degree. But it was attended with a glory and a sublimity which repel all familiar views, all diminutive representations; and demand thoughts of the highest reverence, and language of the highest elevation. All those epithets, which are applied with the utmost propriety and force to human tenderness, and the soft affections of our race, are here, in my view, wholly misplaced. Even the epithet *dear*, when applied to the Saviour, although sanctioned in many hymns; some of them written by persons of great respectability; has ever appeared to me too familiar, too colloquial, too diminutive, to be applied to this exalted person: so that I never either hear or read it without pain. At the same time, many of the strong impassioned exclamations, which are often employed in endeavouring to make deep impressions concerning the sufferings of the Saviour, produce I acknowledge on my own mind the contrary effects. The death of Christ ought never to be lamented in such language, as may very properly exhibit our feelings for the intense sufferings of a beloved child, or a darling friend. How differently has even St. Paul, who among the writers of the New Testament, and David, who among those of the Old, have expressed the strongest emotions concerning this affecting subject, exhibited each his own views! Although they are intense, they are yet always dignified, and very often sublime.

7. *The gospel ought to be preached acceptably.*

It is a common opinion, that all the censures thrown out against what is said by an orthodox preacher, arise either from his want of talents, from some prejudice against the man, or from the hatred of the human heart to the truth which he utters. Either of these attributions, particularly the last, may serve as a convenient shelter for the preacher's faults; but is not a fair account of the fact. That the heart is naturally opposed to divine truth, and that those who declare it honestly are for this reason often censured, I have not a doubt. But the preacher not unfrequently occasions

the censure by his own fault; and ought never to shun the blame which he has merited.

Solomon has taught us, that *a word fitly spoken is like apples,* or *citrons, of gold in a net-work of silver;* a beautiful object *beautifully exhibited,* and therefore making an impression remarkably delightful. Of Solomon, also styled *the preacher* by the Spirit of God, it is recorded, that *he sought to find out acceptable words:* and *that* while writing a part of the scriptural canon. Who, with these considerations before him, can doubt that this is universally the duty of such as preach the gospel?

But there are men who in the desk appear to choose the character and attitude of polemics. This character is sometimes rendered necessary, and is then defensible; but when taken up of choice merely, is always disagreeable and disadvantageous.

There are others who, when particular terms or phrases have become odious by being used and marked in the progress of a vehement dispute, adopt them still either from choice or negligence; and thus warn their hearers beforehand, to dislike whatever they are prepared to say.

A third class select a phraseology calculated to persuade an audience, that they hold unheard-of and unwarrantable opinions; when, if they would use customary language only, their tenets would be found to differ in nothing from those which are commonly received. In this manner the preacher alarms his hearers, not concerning their sin and danger, but concerning his own heresy; and occasions an opposition literally causeless and useless.

Some attack from the desk such as have personally offended them; and thus make it a rostrum of satire and revenge; instead of a pulpit where the tidings of salvation are to be published.

To preach acceptably demands all the characteristics already insisted on in this discourse; plainness, variety, boldness, solemnity, earnestness, and affection. It also demands something more. It requires that the preacher should avoid all these irregularities; that he should be cautious of pushing his sentiments to rank extremes; that he should wantonly give no offence to any man; that he should select, as far as he can, acceptable words; and that he should appear

wholly engaged in promoting the salvation of his flock. His discourses ought to be the result of solid thought, careful study, and complete conviction of the truth and importance of Christianity.

Finally, they ought to appear fraught with piety to God, and integrity to men.

In this manner the gospel, unless I mistake, was originally preached. In this manner it will, I think, be preached by every minister who unites the *wisdom of the serpent with the innocence of the dove.* In this manner particularly it will be preached by him who, comprehending thoroughly the nature of his office, and feeling the necessity of discharging the duties of it faithfully, designs in the end to give a joyful account of his stewardship to God.

SERMON CLIV.

THE EXTRAORDINARY MEANS OF GRACE.

VARIOUS DUTIES OF MINISTERS.

And sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God, and our fellow-labourer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and comfort you concerning your faith.—1 THESS. III. 2.

HAVING examined at length the great duty of *preaching the gospel* in the two preceding discourses, I shall now proceed to a summary consideration of *other ministerial duties.*

In the text Timothy is said to be sent to the Thessalonians, *to establish them and to comfort them concerning their faith.* What was here the business of Timothy, is the proper business of every minister of the gospel. From the text therefore I derive this doctrine;

That every minister of the gospel is appointed for the establishment of Christians. This truth will not be questioned. I shall therefore enter immediately upon a consideration

of the principal remaining methods in which the duties specified in the text are to be performed.

I. *Every minister is bound to give himself diligently to study.*

This duty is abundantly enjoined in the Scriptures. *Meditate,* says St. Paul to Timothy, *upon these things. Give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear unto all. A bishop,* he farther says, *must be apt to teach.* Plainly therefore he must learn the things which he is to teach. He must *not* be *a novice, lest, being lifted up with pride, he fall into the condemnation of the devil.* That these precepts require of every minister the diligent study of the Scriptures, will not, I suppose, be disputed. This however is far from being all that is required. Every minister is bound to enable himself to study the Scriptures with success. Unless this is done, the thing directly commanded can never be done to any valuable purpose. A child may study them with great diligence throughout his childhood; and an ignorant man throughout his life; and yet both be novices in the end. *A novice* here denotes *a new convert to the faith;* and by Chrysostom is said to mean *one newly instructed,* or *one who has been instructed but a little time.* The original word denotes *a plant lately set out* or *planted.* Its real import is *a person who knows little about what he pretends to teach.* Timothy, at the writing of this epistle, was about thirty-two years of age; had been long, even *from a child, acquainted with the Holy Scriptures;* had been a convert about twelve or thirteen years; had been continually instructed in the gospel by St. Paul, and had enjoyed the benefit of *his* wisdom, learning, and inspiration, throughout this period. Besides, he appears to have possessed superior talents, a good education, and supernatural endowments in a high degree. Still all these directions Paul judged to be necessary for him. For he expressly cautions him not to let any man despise his youth. How much more are the same directions necessary to a youth who is only preparing himself for the ministry of the gospel!

To every man who would well understand any complicated subject, comprehensive views, clear discernment, and the art of arranging his thoughts with skill and perspicuity,

are indispensable. These attainments are the result only of long-continued study, habits of exact discrimination, and extensive practice in the art of methodizing his thoughts.

To a minister, all this is peculiarly necessary. His prime business is to teach; and he must therefore have learned. An ignorant teacher is a contradiction in terms.

The prime object of study to a minister is the BIBLE. In order to understand this sacred book, it is necessary not only to study it intensely and abundantly, but to become acquainted also with the languages in which it was written. The importance of this knowledge is completely seen in the fact, that *the Scriptures are ultimately what they were, as they came from the hands of the writers; not as they came from the hands of the translators.*

Another requisite is, *an acquaintance with ecclesiastical history.* This will teach him the sins and virtues, the errors and sound doctrines, the prosperous and the adverse circumstances, which have existed in the church in its various ages; together with the causes by which they have been produced. Generally, he will derive from this source the same advantages, in the ecclesiastical sense, which the statesman derives, in a political sense, from civil history. He will learn what the church has been; why it has thus been; and how in many respects it may be rendered better and happier.

Another requisite to the same end is *an acquaintance with wise and learned commentaries on the Scriptures.* The authors of these must, in many instances, have understood this sacred book better than himself. By a prudent recurrence to their explications, he will be enabled to gain a knowledge of it which otherwise would be impracticable.

The science of ethics is only a branch of theology.

Logic is indispensable to make him a sound reasoner; and *rhetoric* to teach him how to write and how to speak with skill and success.

The *knowledge of history and geography* is indispensable to all men who would make contemplation or instruction any serious part of their business.

The book of man is to every minister a necessary object of investigation, that he may know to what beings he

preaches; how to preach to them in an interesting and useful manner; and how to understand, explain, and impress, a multitude of scriptural passages.

Generally, all that knowledge which will enlarge and invigorate his mind, will, so far as he can attain it, contribute to render *him* a more able and judicious preacher, and *his discourses* more instructive, interesting, and edifying, to his hearers.

A considerable number of persons, professing to believe the Bible, are found in this and other countries, generally persons remarkably ignorant, who have pronounced *learning*, or as they have termed it *book-learning*, to be a disqualification for the ministerial office. Ignorant as they are, they have still understanding enough to perceive, that ignorance itself cannot furnish a man for the business of teaching. They have accordingly provided a substitute for learning; which in a preacher they could not otherwise avoid acknowledging to be indispensable. The substitute is this. *Their preachers, as they profess to believe, are supplied directly from heaven with supernatural light and power; so as to enable them clearly to understand, and profitably to expound, the word of God.* They farther declare, *that men destitute of these endowments, cannot even understand his word; that the real and only profitable sense of the Scriptures is mystical,* and *not at all discerned by common eyes; that to understand it at all, the supernatural endowments which they claim are absolutely necessary; and that learning therefore is of no use to this end.* This is the substance of their doctrine; although expressed by them, as every thing else concerning religion is expressed by ignorant and enthusiastic men, with much uncertainty and confusion.

This scheme deserves a sober examination on two accounts only. One is, *that it is seriously adopted by its votaries.* The other is, that *these are considerably numerous.* For these reasons I shall animadvert upon it in the following observations.

1. *The Scriptures give us no reason to conclude, that inspiration would continue after the apostolic age.*

The endowment challenged by these men appears to be that kind and degree of inspiration which was formerly

given to those whose business it was *to interpret unknown tongues.* I do not mean, that they directly challenge this character in express terms; but this is what they mean, if they mean any thing. The Scriptures they declare to be written in language which, as to its true and useful meaning, is unknown to mankind at large. They, as they profess, are endowed by Heaven with the power of interpreting it to others. But the Scriptures give us no reason to believe that any such inspiration exists. The burden of proof plainly lies upon them: and, if they fail of furnishing it, their pretensions stand for nothing.

2. *If they are actually thus inspired; their inspiration can be of no use to mankind.*

The language which they use in interpreting the Scriptures, is the plain common language of men. The Scriptures are written in this very language, chosen with incomparably more skill and success than that which is used by these preachers. The most important things in the Bible are written in the plainest possible manner. If mankind cannot understand the terms here used; the terms which *they* employ must be still more unintelligible. Their labours therefore must be absolutely useless.

So far as the language of the Scriptures is attended with any difficulty, and demands any skill in interpreting it, the efforts of these men are worse than nothing. The only power by which any language can be correctly explained to those who speak it, is *critical skill in that language.* But this these men have not begun to possess. When therefore they comment, they merely blunder. What they attempt to explain, they only perplex. As they do not understand the language themselves; it is impossible that they should make it understood by others.

3. *They give no proof that they are thus inspired.*

The apostles proved their inspiration in three unobjectionable ways. They wrought miracles, uttered unrivalled wisdom; and exhibited throughout their lives unrivalled virtue. These men furnish neither of these proofs. They do not pretend to work miracles: they are always weak, ignorant, and foolish; and though sometimes it is to be hoped men of piety, are never distinguished by any remarkable excellence; but fall below most other pious men,

through the influence of characteristical pride, prejudice, enthusiasm, censoriousness, and bigotry.

As therefore they furnish no proof that they possess this power; mankind are under no obligation to believe their pretensions. Neither the apostles, nor even Christ himself, claimed the least faith in their mission, nor the least obedience to their precepts, until they had proved themselves sent from God, and inspired with the knowledge of his will by the unanswerable evidence of miracles. Nor can it be supposed, that God would require us to believe any man to be inspired, or sent with a commission from himself, unless he furnished clear, unquestionable proof of his inspiration. If we were to admit the contrary position, and were required to believe men to be inspired because they asserted themselves to be inspired; there is no error which we should not be obliged to receive; and scarcely any crime which we should not be called upon to commit. No men have been more erroneous; few men have been more wicked; than such as have claimed inspiration. Such were Judas, Gaulonites, Theudas, and Barchochab: and such have been many in succeeding ages. But the preachers in question furnish no evidence of their own inspiration whatever.

4. *They are not thus inspired.*

From what has been observed under the last head, it is evident that, if they were inspired, their inspiration could be of no possible use to any but themselves; because, as they give no proof of it, none can warrantably believe it. But it is contradictory to the whole history of God's providence, that men should be inspired for their own benefit merely. No fact of this kind is recorded in the Scriptures. Nor can it be admitted by common sense.

But the men themselves furnish ample proof that they are not inspired. They are ignorant of the propriety and meaning of language; and use it falsely, absurdly, and in violation of the plainest rules of grammar. They reason weakly, erroneously, and inconclusively; lay down false premises, and draw false conclusions. Their sentiments are regularly vulgar; often gross; and not unfrequently indecent. It is impossible, that the Author of all wisdom should be the author of folly; inspire absurdity; and dis-

close his own pleasure in the lame conceptions of ignorance, in the mistakes of mental imbecility, and in the disgusting sentiments of indecent vulgarism. Ignorant men he may undoubtedly inspire: but their inspiration makes them cease to be ignorant men; enlarges their views; ennobles their sentiments; and adorns all their communications with pre-eminent propriety and dignity. The writings of Peter and John have communicated wisdom, elevation, and refinement, to the ablest men of all succeeding ages. Nothing was ever more unlike their writings, than the crude effusions of the preachers in question. Besides, the doctrines which they teach, are contradictory to each other. The language of Scripture they frequently misunderstand, and misinterpret; supposing that which is simple to be figurative, and that which is figurative to be simple; and thus making the Scriptures speak not only what they never meant, but what it is impossible that they should mean; *viz.* gross absurdity. Were an intelligent man to attribute these things to the Spirit of God, he would in my view be guilty of blasphemy. These preachers are shielded from this charge only by their ignorance.

The priests and prophets of the Jewish church were almost all *educated men.* Whenever they were not, and often when they were, they were inspired. *The priests' lips,* says God in Malachi, *should keep knowledge; and they should seek the law at his mouth; for he is the messenger of the Lord of Hosts.* If *the priests* were to *keep knowledge,* they must have previously obtained it. Such plainly ought to be the conduct of every *messenger of the Lord of Hosts.* The apostles were educated for a series of years by the best of all teachers, the Saviour of mankind; and were then inspired. In this manner were ministers anciently prepared for the business of instructing mankind.

Thus the pretence on which these men act, is unfounded, false, and vain.

The basis on which it is erected is, I presume, the following text. *The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.* But of this text, and of others like it, they totally mistake the meaning. Spiritual discernment is *that view of divine*

truth which is experienced by those who love it. Such persons by this discernment perceive the excellence and beauty of that truth, but are not enabled by it to understand in any other respect the meaning of a single passage at all better, than they would have understood it without this discernment. It does not at all enlarge the understanding, communicate knowledge of language, nor enable the mind to discern the proper sense of that language. Every sanctified child has spiritual discernment. Still he is a child; extremely limited in his understanding, ignorant of the meaning of words, and incapable of interpreting scriptural passages. These preachers are only larger children. St. Paul has forcibly described their character in Heb. v. 12, &c. *For when for the time ye ought to be teachers;* or, as rendered by Dr. Macknight; *For though you ought to have been teachers on account of the time* (that is, have lived so long under the gospel, that ye ought to have known enough of it to teach others), *ye have need, that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God;* and are become such as have need *of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age,* even those *who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.* How different is this character from that of *the scribe instructed unto the kingdom of heaven, who is like unto a householder, that bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old!*

II. *Every minister is to conduct both the common and peculiar ordinances of divine worship.*

The common ordinances of this worship he is to regulate according to the Scriptures; and administer them to all who are present: and no other person is to interfere with his administrations. The peculiar ordinances he alone is also to administer: the Lord's supper, as the apostles did, to professing Christians only: baptism to professing Christians offering themselves to him, unexceptionably, as candidates for admission into the church; and to the infant children of professing Christians.

The rules by which he is to conduct the mode of admi-

nistration are, so far as they are applicable, those which have been given concerning preaching. The administration is to be marked with dignity, solemnity, explicitness, and affection; so that every thing may be distinctly understood and deeply felt. In the prayers accompanying these administrations, and when the occasion permits in suitable expositions of the great things which they teach, he may advantageously unfold just conceptions of the nature and import of the ordinances administered; and powerfully impress them on the minds of those who are present. Still more particularly should he explain and impress them in his sermons to the utmost of his power. If they are not thus *explained* they will become, in the view of his flock, mere symbols, without meaning or use. If they are not thus *impressed*, they will be in danger of being profaned and disregarded.

III. *Every minister is to preside over, and direct the discipline of, the church.*

A minister is by his office a ruler in the church, and *the* ruler in his own church. In this character he is bound to *rule well;* and in this ruling is to *be accounted worthy of double honour*. He is required to *take the oversight thereof, not as lording it over God's heritage, but as an ensample to the flock; not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but as of a ready mind.*

All government is intended for the benefit of the governed. In that which Christ has established for the benefit of his church, this equitable principle is conspicuous in every part of the system. A strong, uniform, controlling sense of this truth, will of itself direct to almost all that conduct in ecclesiastical government which is evangelical, and prevent almost all that which is wrong. The minister is bound to feel in this case nothing but the honour of his Master, and the good of his flock. All favouritism and prejudice, all cunning and worldly policy, all selfish schemes and by-ends, are by the Scriptures shut out of the institution. As in preaching, so in ruling, he is required *not to walk in guile, craftiness,* or hypocrisy; *to renounce the hidden things of dishonesty; and to commend himself to every man's conscience in the sight of God.*

Passion also is never to be indulged in the performance of this duty. *A bishop must not be soon angry,* says St. Paul, *nor self-willed, but blameless and patient. The servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all men; in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves.*

While he is bound to *rebuke them that sin before all, that others may fear;* he is *to prefer no man before another; and to do nothing by partiality.* In the discipline which respects other ministers, he is bound *not* to *receive a railing accusation, but before,* that is on the testimony of, *two or three witnesses:* and all *those elders who rule well,* he, together with their people, is to *account worthy of double honour.*

The peculiar directions, given in Scripture concerning ecclesiastical discipline, I propose to consider hereafter. At the present time it will be sufficient to observe, that he is to do nothing, to omit nothing, and, so far as is in his power, to suffer nothing to be done or omitted, which is not directly authorized in the word of God.

IV. *He is also to unite with his brethren in obtaining other ministers.*

Ordaining is the consecration of a minister by the laying on of the hands of the presbytery, and by prayer. At the same time, *a charge* containing a series of solemn injunctions, and similar to that which St. Paul gave to Timothy, *is to be delivered to the person ordained by the united authority of those who act in the ordination.* This charge is to enjoin all the great duties of his office, and the manner in which they are to be performed. *The right hand of fellowship is to be given to him also,* as it was to Paul and Barnabas by the apostles at Jerusalem, assuring him of the cordial friendship, communion, and co-operation, of his Christian brethren, both in the ministry and in the churches.

Concerning all these things, since they are perfectly understood, and uniformly practised with great decency throughout this country, it will be unnecessary to make any particular remarks. I shall therefore only add, that there are, in the Epistles to Timothy and Titus, so many injunctions on the people concerning *their duty,* as in my

opinion to warrant, and in a sense demand, that *a charge enjoining it upon them* should become a part of these solemnities.

The chief difficulty connected with the business of ordination, will almost always be found *in selecting the proper persons to be ordained.* The character given of these persons, particularly in the above-mentioned Epistles, and generally throughout the New Testament, is the authoritative, the perfect, and the only, directory concerning this subject. This character is even to be regarded as indispensable, and invariably to be demanded. Unless it be found substantially in a candidate for ordination, he is of course to be rejected.

Particularly he is, in the evangelical sense, to be a good man; of a fair Christian profession; of an unblamable Christian life; holden in esteem by the church; well reported of by others; of competent capacity and attainments; and marked with that prudence which our Saviour required of his apostles. His doctrines are to be evangelical and uncorrupt; and his public exhibitions edifying and approved. All these characteristics, those who ordain are bound to see amply attested. Indeed, unless he possess them, he cannot, in my opinion, be warrantably licensed to preach the gospel.

Among the things indispensably necessary in the character of such a candidate, and yet not unfrequently less insisted on, than this ministerial duty demands, is the *prudence* or *discretion* just mentioned. A man may be *a good man,* and yet be indiscreet: but he can hardly be *a useful man.* An indiscreet or imprudent minister will rarely do good at all; and will certainly do much harm. A minister is an object of inspection to all eyes, and regarded as responsible to all men. Every impropriety, even such as would be unnoticed in other men of fair characters, will be seen, marked, and remembered, in him, as a serious defect; and will produce serious mischief. The minister who would avoid this mischief must, like the wife of Cæsar, not be suspected by persons of moderation and candour.

It was a memorable observation of a late venerable minister of Massachusetts, a man distinguished for wisdom and excellence, and of more than sixty years' standing in

the sacred office, that among all the ministers at whose dismission he had been present, and who were dismissed for some fault in themselves, neither heresy nor immorality had occasioned the dismission of more than one out of twenty; while imprudence had been the cause of this calamity to the remaining nineteen. Of the truth of this observation there cannot be a doubt. He who considers the uneasiness, contentions, and other mischiefs, accompanying this event, will deeply feel the importance of preventing the chief cause of these evils. But this can be effectually done only by refusing to admit imprudent men into the ministry.

It is remarkable, that the first direction given by Christ to the apostles, after he had commissioned them to go out, and preach among the people of Judea, enjoined upon them discretion. *Be ye wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.* The first article also in St. Paul's two recitals to Timothy and Titus of the duties of a bishop is, *A bishop must be blameless.* Discretion is the source of a blameless life. No excellence of heart attained by man, will ensure this character. On the other hand, prudent men are sometimes, even when destitute of religion, more unblamable in their deportment than some real Christians. Prudence and imprudence affect every thing in a man's life: especially in a minister's life; and therefore give it the predominating colour. Prudence is the great preventive of all thoughtless, rash, and dangerous conduct. Imprudence, on the contrary, betrays a man into every headlong measure; and lays up abundant materials for sore mortification and repentance; producing multiplied evils, which must be regretted, but can never be repaired. When therefore St. Paul requires Timothy to *lay hands suddenly on no man,* in order to avoid becoming *a partaker in* other men's sins, and to *keep himself pure;* he is justly understood as cautioning Timothy against introducing imprudent as well as irreligious persons into the ministry. It is impossible that such persons should have *a good report of those who are without;* or, for any length of time, of those who are within. Nor is their misconduct a series of mere defects only, but of real faults also. The fact, that we will not take effectual care to avoid doing mischief, especially in so important a concern, is itself a gross fault. Of the same nature

are all those minor transgressions which proceed from this negligence. Such persons can never be proper candidates for ordination, nor even for a licence to preach the gospel.

That every candidate should be a man of piety, needs no proof; nor *that he should be qualified by his capacity and attainments to perform usefully all the duties of the ministerial office.* Both characters are abundantly required in the Scriptures; and every minister, when called to the business of ordaining, has his whole duty with respect to both summed up in that remarkable injunction of St. Paul: *The things which thou hast heard of me, commit thou unto faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.*

V. *Every minister is to instruct and edify his flock in private as well as in public.*

Preaching is intended to be adapted to the *common wants* and *circumstances* of a congregation. But there are multitudes of cases in which individuals need *peculiar counsel, exhortation,* and reproof. These sermons will not always furnish. Private advice must often be given to the person who alone is concerned. The subjects of this instruction are almost endlessly diversified: involving whatever is peculiar to sinners and to saints. In every important case of this nature, those who are concerned are required to apply to their minister for spiritual direction and assistance; and this assistance he is required to furnish. For this purpose he is bound, as far and as speedily as may be, to obtain the necessary qualifications. In interviews of this nature he will find opportunities of doing good which are not presented in the course of his public duties. The individuals who are under his charge he will there meet in the character of a beloved and most necessary friend. The difficulties under which they severally labour, he will hear described exactly by themselves. Of course he will learn exactly what is necessary or useful to the person who is concerned; the views, whether just or erroneous, which he entertains; the proper means of removing his prejudices, doubts, fears, and sorrows; the kind of consolation, instruction, and support, to be administered; and generally the peculiar means of doing him peculiar good. Whatever the minister says, also, will at such a time be realized by the individual as

directed to himself, and not to another; as reaching his own peculiar case, and meeting the very difficulties under which he labours; will have all the lively and impressive, the engaging and endearing, nature of conversation; and will therefore be peculiarly listened to, felt, and remembered. The minister will be especially beloved, and therefore peculiarly obeyed.

Occasions for the performance of this duty are numerous, and daily occurring. *A house of sorrow, and a sick bed,* furnish opportunities for doing good of this nature which are eminently advantageous; as does also *every season of peculiar religious anxiety.* Generally, whenever a minister is with his parishioners, he should follow a rule given by a wise and good man to a young preacher, who was his pupil, "Wherever you are, remember on every proper occasion to drop a word for God."

The administration of reproof is one of the most difficult duties of a minister. For all transgressions which are private, and for many which are not, reproofs should be private. *Go and tell thy brother his fault between him and thee alone,* is a rule of supreme wisdom, applicable to very many cases beside that which is directly specified, and scarcely capable of being too much regarded by ministers of the gospel. Nor in any case, except where necessity requires it, should the facts be disclosed afterward. To reprove successfully is an attainment highly important, and far less common than could be wished. The great secret lies in seeking the happiest opportunities; in exhibiting the gentleness, meekness, and forbearance, of the gospel; and in evincing a desire of nothing but of doing real good to him who is reproved. Pride, petulance, and passion; airs of superiority, resentment, or indifference; stinging expressions, and even those which are blunt or cold; are here wholly misplaced; and will awaken no emotions but those of anger and contempt. Even the Psalmist could say, *Let the righteous smite me kindly and reprove me: Let not their precious oil break my head.* At the same time, every minister should remember, that to reprove privately, as well as publicly, is an indispensable part of his duty; and that *as an ear-ring of gold, and an ornament of fine gold, so is a wise reprover upon an obedient ear.*

All the parts of this duty are to be regulated by the same principles which have been mentioned as the directories of preaching. These every minister is bound therefore faithfully to observe. For the same end he ought also to converse with the books in which, and the persons by whom, cases of conscience are most judiciously explained, and the true and false evidences of piety most distinctly stated. In addition to this, he ought to read, in the most careful manner, *the book of man,* to examine the human character with the most critical observation; and to learn as far may be its interesting varieties. A familiar correspondence with his own congregation, will extensively furnish him with this valuable knowledge.

The greatest danger, with regard to the several divisions of this duty, is, that from *sloth, or reluctance of some other kind, he will be induced to perform it defectively.* That he may avoid this evil, he ought to begin it at the commencement of his ministry; and as soon as possible to make it an immoveable habit. In this manner, and perhaps in no other, it will be effectually done.

VI. *Every minister is bound to enforce all the doctrines and duties of religion upon his congregation by an edifying and blameless example.*

Be thou an example of the believers, said St. Paul to Timothy, *in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.*

On this subject, highly important as it is, I need not dwell: for both the truth and importance of the precept will be acknowledged by all men. The greatest difficulty which a good man will meet in obeying it, will be found, not in doing good things, but in avoiding bad ones. For this end he is required to watch himself, and to remember, that he is watched by all men; especially that he is watched by God. He ought diligently to make it his settled plan, to consider all his conduct before it is adopted; to compare his designs of every kind with the scriptural precepts; and wherever any action is not absolutely enjoined or forbidden, to weigh well even its remote consequences. He is bound to recollect continually that he is appointed, and required to be an example, to the flock; that every false step

which he takes, will be an occasion of stumbling to others, a grief to Christians, a dishonour to his office, a violation of his duty, and an occasion which will be taken by the enemies of Christ to blaspheme. In a word, he ought ever to keep in mind, that, if he adorns the doctrine of the gospel, he will glorify God, and prove the means of good to the church, and to his own soul. If on the contrary he disgraces that doctrine, let him remember, that he will dishonour God; injure the church; wrong his own soul; destroy the efficacy of his preaching; and, instead of promoting, probably prevent, the salvation of his fellow-men.

REMARKS.

1. *From these observations we learn, that the ministerial office is of great utility to mankind.*

Of course he who holds it ought with extreme caution to avoid every thing by which it may be either disgraced, or in any other manner prevented from its proper efficacy to accomplish its illustrious ends. At the same time, all others are bound to regard it with respect. The hatred and contempt therefore, the obloquy and ridicule, with which this office has been so often loaded, are unmerited and misplaced; and ought to cover their authors with shame, confusion, and remorse.

2. *These observations prove, that it is also an office attended with great difficulties, and demanding, for the faithful and efficacious discharge of it, many important qualifications, and many laborious efforts.*

Hence it ought never to be assumed without solemn consideration; a thorough examination of the difficulties which it involves, the self-denial with which it must be attended; and a fixed determination to discharge its duties faithfully, and to sustain its difficulties with unshaken fortitude. Hence also every minister is bound to seek assistance from God in daily prayer. God only can enable him to discharge his duty faithfully, comfortably, or usefully; and he will thus enable him, if his aid be sought aright.

In the same manner his people are bound to ask for him

the same blessings. Thus Paul directs the churches to whom he wrote, *to pray for him without ceasing*, that he might be a good, useful, and faithful minister of Christ.

A young man who thinks of devoting himself to this solemn employment, in such a manner as he ought to think, will naturally ask, *Who is sufficient for these things;* The answer to this interesting inquiry is given by St. Paul: *We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.* All these difficulties have ever existed, and usually in greater degrees than in this country: and they have all been successfully encountered by faithful men, even when possessed of moderate talents. Such men in very great numbers have been eminently successful ministers of righteousness. Every person solemnly devoting himself to this office, may for his consolation be assured, that the grace of God will be glorified in his weakness, and will be sufficient for him in every difficulty. Let him also remember, that *when the chief Shepherd shall appear, he shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.*

SERMON CLV.

THE EXTRAORDINARY MEANS OF GRACE.

OFFICERS OF THE CHURCH. DEACONS.

And in those days, when the number of the disciples were multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration. Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look you out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word. And the saying pleased the whole multitude, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte of Antioch, whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them.—ACTS VI. 1—6.

THIS passage of Scripture is the history of the transaction in which *deacons* were instituted in the Christian church, and is in my view the only instance in which their origin is mentioned. Dr. Mosheim, indeed, and several other respectable writers, suppose that deacons existed before this time, and are spoken of by Christ, Luke xxii. 26, in the following passage: *But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve.* Here the word for *younger* is νεωτερος, and for *he that doth serve*, διακονων. The latter word he supposes to be unanswerably explanatory of the former, and to denote here appropriately the office of *a deacon in the Christian church.* Μειζων also, the Greek

word for *greatest*, he considers as denoting *a ruler*, or *presbyter*; because it is explained by ηγουμενος, *chief*, and contrasted to διακονων.

In conformity to this interpretation he supposes, that the young men who carried Ananias and Sapphira to their burial were deacons in the proper sense. In support, and as he thinks in absolute confirmation, of this opinion, he observes, that St. Peter says, *And likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves to the elder.* Here the words used are νεωτεροι and πρεσβυτεροι: *the latter* meaning, as he apprehends, *the elders of the church*, and *the former the deacons*. To all this he adds, that this sense of the word νεωτεροι might be confirmed by numberless citations from Greek and Roman writers, and a variety of authors sacred and profane.

From these considerations Dr. Mosheim concludes, that *there were deacons in the church antecedently to the transaction recorded in the text. These*, he observes, *were elected from among the Jews who were born in Palestine*, and were suspected by the foreign Jews of partiality in distributing the offerings which were made for the support of the poor. Hence was derived, in his view, *the murmuring of the Grecian* or *Hellenistic Jews against the Hebrews*, mentioned in the text. To remedy this disorder, seven other deacons were chosen by order of the apostles; of whom, he supposes, six are by their names determined to have been foreigners; and the other was a proselyte from Antioch.

This account must be allowed to be both ingenious and plausible. I cannot however think it just: for the following reasons.

1. *It seems to me incredible, that Christ should have formed an order of officers in his church by his own immediate appointment, and yet that no writer of the New Testament should have furnished us any account, nor even any hint, concerning this fact.*

The passage quoted from St. Luke is, to say the most, not an account, but a mere recognition, of the fact. At the same time, the words in their customary acceptation are capable of a better, as well as a more obvious, meaning

than that annexed to them by Dr. Mosheim. His interpretation of the text is, *He that performs the office of a presbyter or an elder among you, let him not think himself superior to the ministers or deacons.*

The amount of this interpretation is no other, than that Christ requires the presbyter not to think himself, as an officer of the church, superior to a deacon. But this certainly cannot be just. The superiority of the former to the latter, both in station and authority, is every where disclosed in the Scriptures. The presbyter therefore cannot but know this, and plainly ought to think it, because it is true. If Dr. Mosheim intends, that the elders should feel that humble disposition only which the words evidently indicate; I answer, that humility is unquestionably the great thing here inculcated by the Saviour. But this is much more naturally and forcibly inculcated, if we take the words in their common acceptation, than by supposing them to denote these officers. The general phraseology, *greatest* and *chief, the younger and he that serveth,* indicates to every man the spirit and deportment enjoined by Christ as perfectly as they can be indicated. When we are told, that the greatest is bound to feel and act as a youth or child ought to feel and act; and that he who is chief ought to behave with the modesty and humility of him whose business it is to serve; humility is certainly inculcated with as much explicitness and force as language admits. Christ accordingly adopted this very manner of instruction concerning the same subject on other occasions. In Mark ix. 34, we are informed of *a dispute* which the disciples had among themselves, *who should be greatest.* Christ, to reprove this foolish ambition, *called the twelve, and said unto them, If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all. And he took a child, and set him in the midst of them; and when he had taken him into his arms, he said unto them, Whosoever shall receive one of such children in my name receiveth me.*

At the same time humility is enjoined by an allusion, not only obvious and familiar, but applicable also to all men, and therefore much more extensively instructive to those who should either hear or read the precept.

2. *The followers of Christ were not, at this time, sufficiently numerous to be organized in the manner here supposed.*

The number of Christ's followers was, at this time, very small. A great part of these also followed him occasionally only; and seem to have been, at other times, at their own proper places of habitation, pursuing their customary business. In these scattered and changing circumstances we can scarcely conceive, that Christians can have been so organized into a body, as to constitute a church with its proper officers. The first mention made of *elders* in the Christian church, even at Jerusalem, I mean as distinguished from the apostles, is in Acts xi. 30, about eleven or twelve years after the ascension. Until this time there is not a hint in the New Testament, that any other men exercised authority in the Christian church, beside inspired men, as such, and the *seven deacons*, although the office of elder was constituted by Christ in the general commission given to ministers.

3. *In the act of choosing the deacons recorded in the text, there is not the least allusion to any pre-existing officers of that title or character.*

On the contrary, the spirit of the passage appears to forbid this construction. The murmuring of the Grecian Jews against the Hebrews is not specified as directed against the Hebrew deacons, but against the Hebrews, or the body of Hebrew believers. If it was really directed against the Hebrew deacons, the record, as it now stands, cannot be true.

To remove the cause of this murmuring, the apostles summoned the church together, and addressed them as in the text. *It is not reason, that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables.* If the business of serving tables had been already committed to deacons, as the proper and known officers, to transact this business; could the apostles suppose the church would expect them to undertake it? Would not the Grecian Jews have complained of the Hebrew deacons in form; and required that others, of a more satisfactory character, should be appointed? The apostles would then, I think, have called the faulty deacons to an account, and censured them for their miscon-

duct. After this, they would either have ejected them from office, or added to them others, or required of them a more faultless future behaviour. But they would not have supposed, that the church could expect *them* to perform this duty contrary to a known institution of Christ.

Again; they direct the church to choose seven men of specified qualifications, whom *they* might appoint over this business. If the appointment was now made the first time, this language was natural; but, if Christ had already instituted the office, would scarcely have been used. The apostles, I believe, no where speak of any institution of Christ under the style of an appointment of their own. On the contrary, they always appeal to his authority, where he had expressly exercised it: and it is, I think, to be believed, that the evangelists have recorded every such appointment.

The apostles farther say, *But we will give ourselves to prayer, and the ministry of the word.* This language seems plainly to be that of persons who were expected in some measure to desist from prayer and the ministry of the word, in order to perform other necessary business; but cannot have been an answer to persons soliciting them to appoint an additional number of deacons in the church. On the contrary, it is the proper language of men who considered themselves, and were considered by those around them, as the sole officers of the church at that time. In consequence of this fact, their brethren naturally thought, that every office was to be executed by them, or by others under their direction. The subject was, I think, left to them indefinitely; that they might resolve on such measures as they should choose to have pursued. In this view of the subject, the observations made by the apostles seem natural and proper; but, according to the scheme of Dr. Mosheim, are scarcely capable of a satisfactory explanation.

4. *If this passage does not contain the original appointment of deacons, there is no allusion to it in the New Testment.*

Is this credible? The appointment and the office are of divine authority; and therefore are required to be upheld by the church. Yet the church is no where informed.

when, or where, or how, this office was instituted. We are not, I acknowledge, warranted to determine in what manner Christ would direct the records of his mission and pleasure to be written. But we are, I believe, authorized to say, that the case here proposed would be singular and without any parallel in the Scriptures.

The argument of Dr. Mosheim is made up of these two parts. First, *That the word νεωτερος is used in the Scriptures as equivalent to διακονος:* and secondly, *that all bodies of men must have their officers.* To the former of these I reply, that although this use of the term νεωτερος should be conceded, as in the passage alleged from St. Peter perhaps it ought, yet it is I think evident, that this use of the word in the New Testament is very rare. I know of no other instance in which this interpretation of it can be even plausibly supported. It is therefore urged with little success for the purpose in view. To the latter my answer is, that although all bodies of men must have their officers, such bodies must be formed and established in some numbers, and must have a known and stable existence, before those officers can be needed; and that the church had barely arrived at this state, when the deacons mentioned in the text were appointed.

I have felt myself obliged to consider this opinion of Dr. Mosheim and others on account of its connexion with the history of the subject. If the text contains the original institution of this office; the history of it is one thing: if not, it becomes quite another; and, from this supposed diversity, men considerable for their numbers and respectability have been inclined to derive inferences very differently affecting the office and its duties.

Assuming the account which has been given of this subject as just, I proceed to observe, that the whole history of the transaction is the following.

When the disciples, in the infancy of the church, saw some of their number poor and suffering, others necessarily devoted to the public service, and both standing in absolute need of support from the community; they determined with one voice to sell each man his possessions, and to throw the whole into a common stock. From this stock all the members were to derive their sustenance. A considerable

number of the disciples were Grecian, or as they are more usually styled, Hellenistic Jews. The widows belonging to this part of the fraternity were, or were thought to be, neglected in the supplies which were daily administered. These brethren brought their complaint to the apostles. The apostles seem plainly to have considered it as well founded: for they directed the remedy mentioned in the text: *viz.* that the church should choose seven men, of unquestionable qualifications, to superintend this business. They accordingly chose the persons whose names are here recited; and to satisfy the complaining brethren, selected most of them from among the *foreign Jews*. The men chosen were approved by the apostles, and regularly ordained to their office. Immediately after this event, St. Luke observes *the word of God increased; and the number of disciples in Jerusalem multiplied greatly*. God therefore approved the measure, and annexed to it his blessing.

From this history, cleared as I hope of embarrassments, and connected with other passages of Scripture relating to the subject, I propose to examine,

I. *The manner in which deacons were introduced into office;*

II. *The character which they are to sustain;* and,

III. *The purposes for which they are appointed.*

I. *I shall inquire into the manner in which deacons were introduced into office.*

Concerning this I observe,

1. *That they were chosen to it by a vote of the church.*

Wherefore, brethren, said the apostles, *look ye out among you seven men of good report, full of the Holy Ghost and of wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. And the saying pleased the whole multitude,* says the historian, *and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte of Antioch, whom they set before the apostles.*

This election was directed by the apostles. It is therefore a pattern for all churches in the same concern. Every deacon ought therefore to be chosen by the suffrage of the church.

2. *Deacons are to be ordained by the imposition of hands, and by prayer.*

When the brethren had set these men before the apostles, St. Luke informs us, *they prayed, and laid their hands upon them.*

This also is an authoritative example of the manner in which deacons are to be introduced into every church. It is the example of inspired men; and was therefore the pleasure of the Spirit of God. There is no hint in the New Testament, nor even in ecclesiastical history, that they were ever introduced in any other manner. At the same time, there is no precept revoking or altering the authority or influence of this example. It stands therefore in full force; and requires that all persons chosen by the church to this office should be consecrated to the duties of it in the same manner.

It is to be observed farther, that if any such alteration had existed in periods subsequent to the apostolic age, it would have been totally destitute of any authority to *us.* This mode of consecration has in fact been disused in New-England, to a considerable extent. For this however there seems to have been no reason of any value. So far as I have been able to gain information concerning the subject, the disuse was originated at first, and has been gradually extended, by mere inattention: nor is it capable, so far as I know, of any defence.

II. *The character which deacons ought to sustain, as exhibited in the Scriptures, particularly in the text, and in the third chapter of the First Epistle to Timothy, is made up of the following particulars.*

1. *They should be grave.*

Likewise, says St. Paul to Timothy, *must the deacons be grave:* σεμνους, men of dignified gravity.

2. *They must be sincere—Not double-tongued.*

3. *Temperate—Not given to much wine.*

4. *Free from avarice—Not greedy of filthy lucre.*

5. *Acquainted with the doctrines of the gospel. Holding the mystery of the faith,* that is, the gospel.

6. *Honestly attached to the doctrines of the gospel—*

Holding the mystery of the faith in or with *a pure conscience.*

7. *Of a fair Christian reputation.—Brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report:* μαρτυρουμενους, *well reported of,* or having an unblemished character: *being found blameless;* ανεγκλητοι οντες, being unaccused, or irreproachable.

8. *They ought to be proved antecedently to their introduction into office—And let these also first be proved.*

An ancient, perhaps the original mode of proof, was this. The name of the candidate was published in a Christian assembly; that if those who belonged to it, had any thing to object to his character, they might have an opportunity of declaring it to the church. But as no mode is prescribed by the apostle, and as the end of the trial is a thorough knowledge of the candidate's character; whatever will accomplish this end in a satisfactory manner is undoubtedly sufficient. The accomplishment of the end is however always to be insisted on.

9. *They are required to be husbands of one wife.*

In an age when *polygamy* was so common, this direction was important.

10. *They ought to be such as rule well their own families. —Ruling their children, and their own houses, well.*

III. *The purposes for which this office was established are the following:*

1. *They were, I apprehend, intended, in various respects, to be assistants to ministers.*

I have given this as an opinion; and am well aware, that it has been, and probably will hereafter be, disputed. My reasons for it are the following:

First. *I derive it from the directions given by St. Paul concerning the character of the officer.*

It must have struck every person, who has read attentively the character of deacons, insisted on by St. Paul, that it strongly resembles that of a bishop or minister presented to us in the same chapter, and also in the first of the Epistle to Titus, so as in most particulars to be the same. All that which is required in the character of a deacon is,

together with some important additions, also required in that of a bishop. So far as the character in both cases is the same, it is fairly presumed to be necessary to the same ends.

Particularly, I see no reason why deacons should be required to be such *as hold the mystery of the faith,* a direction given concerning bishops, Tit. i. 9, unless this qualification was to be employed in some manner and degree for the same ends. In a bishop this qualification is required, that *he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and to convince gainsayers.* There is undoubtedly no warrant given to deacons in the Scriptures to preach. But there are a multitude of religious instructions of very great importance which are to be given to many persons, and on many occasions, and which still are remote from preaching. Of these the most formal is that class of instructions which are appropriately styled catechetical. Another class is made up of the teaching immediately given in private religious assemblies. Another still may be sufficiently described by the word *occasional.* In all these it would seem that deacons might with great propriety act; and, unless they were to act in these or some other similar modes, it seems difficult to explain why they should be required to possess skill and soundness in the gospel; or how the church should know that they sustained this character.

Secondly. *I argue the same thing from the nature of their office.*

Men of such a character as deacons are required to possess, and acting continually as ecclesiastical officers, cannot fail of obtaining a considerable influence in the church. Influence is one of the principal means of doing good in the present world. This influence can be exerted in no manner which is more natural, or of better efficacy, than that which has been mentioned.

Thirdly. *I argue the same thing from ecclesiastical history.*

Ancient ecclesiastical writers style deacons *ministers of the mysteries of Christ, of the episcopate, and of the church.* They attended the presbyters in the sacramental service, received the offerings of the people, and presented them to the presbyter; and in some churches read the gospel both before and after the communion service; and in some cases

administered baptism. In all these, and in a variety of other services which they performed, they evidently sustained the character of assistants to the minister. It is immaterial to the present purpose, whether these were the most proper services for deacons to perform; the general character of assistants being the only thing at which I here aim. This being admitted, the nature of the case may sufficiently explain the kind of assistance from time to time to be furnished. It may not however be improperly observed, that there are many occasions, some in public, and more in private, religious assemblies, on which deacons may profitably, as well as becomingly, act as assistants to the minister, by praying with those who are assembled; especially when he is absent or infirm. They may greatly aid him also by learning, and communicating to him, as they did in ancient times, the state of his congregation: particularly their errors, dangers, wants, and distresses.

2. *Deacons, in the absence of the minister, and of ruling elders, where such officers exist, are, by their office, moderators of the church.*

3. *It is their proper business to distribute the sacramental elements to the communicants.*

This they have done in all ages of the church. Anciently, they not only distributed the elements to the communicants present, but carried them also to those who were absent.

4. *The great duty of this office is the distribution of the alms of the church to its suffering members.*

The Scriptures abound in directions to Christians, *to provide liberally for the relief of their fellow-Christians;* although most of these directions have been unfortunately misunderstood to enjoin *only the distribution of common charity.* This mistake, one would suppose, would be easily rectified by a single passage. *As we have opportunity,* says St. Paul, *let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.* Gal. vi. 10. To the same purpose we have a more particular direction given in 1 Cor. xvi. 1, 2, *Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him.*

Of this injunction I remark,

First. *That it appears to have been a general direction; so far at least as the contribution for the poor saints at Jerusalem was concerned.* The apostle, with respect to this contribution, had before given the same order to the churches of Galatia; and the churches of Macedonia and Achaia had embarked in the same design; as we are informed Romans xv. 26. The same thing seems to have been finally adopted, as a matter of system, by the apostles Peter, James, and John, in conjunction with St. Paul, when he was at Jerusalem, the second time after his conversion. *They would,* said St. Paul, *that we should remember the poor; the same which I was always forward to do.*

But if we had no other directions concerning this subject in the sacred volume, the history contained in the text would be amply sufficient. *The very purpose for which the office was instituted in the Christian church, was the distribution of its alms;* an employment highly honourable and evangelical. That this employment was to be universal in the church, and that its poor members were always to receive the benefit of it, is clearly taught, in the fifth chapter of the First Epistle to Timothy, by the directions given concerning *the reception of widows into the number of the poor supported by the church.*

This duty of deacons is also enjoined in Rom. xii. 8. *He that giveth*; μεταδιδους, distributeth; *let him do it with simplicity,* that is, *with disinterestedness and impartiality;* or perhaps, as in the margin, *liberally; and he that sheweth mercy,* that is, relieves the sick, the afflicted, the widow, and the fatherless, *let him do it with cheerfulness.* The business of distributing, and of shewing mercy, was especially the business of this office. Private bounty was to be given to the necessitous by the authors of it at their own pleasure; but the bounty of the church was to flow through its deacons, as its own proper almoners.

The primitive Christians obeyed the injunctions requiring this duty in a manner becoming their profession. They received their fellow-Christians, when travelling, into their houses, and made them welcome to such accommodations as their circumstances permitted. They continually made feasts of charity, to which every Christian present was of course invited; raised weekly contributions, and conveyed

them to their necessitous brethren by officers, whose especial business it was to see that all were impartially and effectually relieved. With a similar care and benevolence they administered relief to sufferers in every other situation.

This conduct being a novelty in the world, and no less honourable than beneficial, strongly attracted the attention of the Heathen; and extorted from them this high proverbial commendation: "See how these Christians love one another." The emperor Julian, an apostate from Christianity, and therefore a bitter enemy to it, acknowledges the fact in terms extremely honourable to the cause which he so earnestly laboured to destroy.

"If," said he, "Hellenism," that is, the religion of the Heathen, "does not prosper according to our wish, it is the fault of those who profess it. Why do we not look to that which has been the principal cause of the augmentation of impiety;" that is, the Christian religion; "humanity to strangers, care in burying the dead, and that sanctity of life of which they make such a show? It is a shame that when the impious Galileans," that is, Christians, "relieve not only their own people, but ours also, our poor should be neglected by us."

Again he says, "It having so happened, as I suppose, that the poor were neglected by our priests, the impious Galileans observing this, have addicted themselves to this kind of humanity, and by the show of such good offices have recommended the worst of things;" that is, the Christian religion. "For beginning with their love-feasts, and the ministry of tables, as they call it (for not only the name, but the thing, is common among them), they have drawn away the faithful to impiety;" that is, Heathens to Christianity.

We have here the strongest evidence that the ancient Christians, down to the days of Julian, maintained the charity of the gospel to their poor and suffering brethren, and to strangers also; and that this charity was distributed in conformity to the account in the text: the ministry of tables being mentioned by him as one of the principal channels through which it flowed. It is plain, also, that in the view of this emperor, this charity was a primary reason why Christianity prevailed in the world. For he exhibits his

full conviction, that it was impossible to spread Heathenism by any other means than a strenuous imitation of this excellent character. The justness of these opinions is in my view unquestionable.

This duty is no less incumbent on Christians at the present time: nor would the advantages arising from the practice of it be less important or conspicuous. In all churches there ought to exist a regular system of contribution, designed solely to provide relief for their poor and suffering members. In every church, a charitable fund ought to be begun and continually supplied by continual collections. Of this fund the deacons ought to be the standing almoners; as being by the authority of God designated to this office.

It may here be objected, and not unnaturally, that *the state has by law made provision for the relief of all poor persons; that all members of churches contribute to this charity in common with others; and that their suffering members take their share of the bounty.* My answer to this objection is the following.

First. *That the poor, both of the church and community at large, have exactly the same right to the property supplied by this tax, which the contributors have to the remainder of their own possessions.*

The law alone creates every man's right to what he calls his estate. To the great mass of the property denoted by this word, he has *by nature* no right at all. But the same law gives exactly the same right to the poor of receiving whatever is taxed upon others for supplying their necessities. The payment of this tax therefore is in no sense an act of charity, but the mere payment of a debt by which, together with other acts of the like nature, each man holds a right to his estate.

Secondly. *The charity in question was immediately instituted and required by God; and is independent of all human institutions.*

No conformity to any regulation, no obedience to any law of man, can go a step towards excusing us from obeying a law of God.

Thirdly. *The provision in question is not made by human laws.*

The intention of furnishing this fund is not *to relieve the absolute necessities* of poor Christians; these being customarily supplied by the operation of law. The object here in view, is *to provide for their comfort.* Nothing can be more contrary to the spirit of Christianity, than that one part of the members of a church should abound in *the conveniences and luxuries* of life, and another be stinted to *its mere necessaries.* Every one ought plainly to share in blessings superior to these. This provision ought to extend to all those enjoyments which are generally denominated *decencies* and *comforts.* Without the possession of these in some good degree, life, so far as its external accommodations are concerned, can hardly be said to be desirable.

I am well aware that the unhappy neglect of this great duty by many of our own churches will be urged and felt as a defence of the contrary doctrine. It is hardly necessary to observe, that no negligence can justify a farther neglect of our duty. Nehemiah and his companions, when *they found it written in the law, that the children of Israel should dwell in booths* at the feast of the tabernacles, *went forth and made themselves booths every one of them,* although their nation had failed of performing this duty, as this excellent man declares, *from the days of Joshua the son of Nun.*

I am also aware, that *the love of money, the root* of so much *evil* in other cases, is *the root of* great *evil* in this; and will, even in the minds of some good men, create not a little opposition to this duty. Until such men learn to love this world less, and God and their fellow-Christians more, objections springing from this source will undoubtedly have their influence.

My audience is chiefly composed of those who are young, and therefore neither devoted to avarice, nor deeply affected by the too customary negligence of this duty. Before them therefore I feel a peculiar satisfaction in bringing up to view this benevolent and divine institution. On their minds the arguments which have been urged will, I trust, have their proper weight. To quicken his just views of this subject, let every one present remember, that even the emperor Julian has said; "I do not believe any man is the poorer for what he gives to the necessitous. I who have

often relieved the poor, have been rewarded by the gods many fold; although wealth is a thing on which I was never much intent." Above all things let every one remember, that Christ, alleging the beneficence of Christians as a ground of their endless happiness in the world above, closes his infinitely momentous address to them with this remarkable declaration. *Inasmuch as ye have done it to one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.*

SERMON CLVI.

THE EXTRAORDINARY MEANS OF GRACE.

THE ORDINANCES OF THE CHURCH. BAPTISM. ITS REALITY AND INTENTION.

Go ye therefore, teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. —MATT. XXVIII. 19.

IN seven discourses preceding this, I have considered *the institution of the church; the members of which it is formed; the officers appointed in the Scriptures to superintend its affairs;* and *the principal duties which they are appointed to perform.* The next subject in a system of theology is, *the ordinances which belong peculiarly to this body of men, and which they are required to celebrate.*

Of these the first in order is *baptism;* as being *that by which the members of the church are, according to Christ's appointment, introduced into this body.*

In the text, Christ directs his apostles to go forth into the world, *and teach,* or *make disciples of, all nations, and to baptize them in,* or *into, the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.* This then is a duty which the apostles were required to perform towards all nations, so far as they made them disciples of Christ

The text therefore presents the subject of baptism to us, as an ordinance to be administered by the pastors of the church to its several members, in consequence of their discipleship. What was the duty of the apostles in this case, is equally the duty of all succeeding ministers. Of course it is the duty of every person, who wishes and is qualified to become a member of the church, to receive the ordinance of baptism.

In my examination of this subject I shall consider,

I. *The reality;*

II. *The intention;*

III. *The proper subjects; of this ordinance:* and

IV. *The manner in which it should be administered.*

I. *I shall make some observations concerning the reality of baptism.*

To persons at all acquainted with ecclesiastical history, it is well known *that several classes of men have denied baptism, in the proper sense, to be a divine institution.* Some of these persons have supported their opinion from Heb. ix. 10; *Which stood only in meats, and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation.* The word here rendered *washings,* is in the Greek βαπτισμοις, *baptisms.* In this passage they have, without any warrant, supposed the baptism of the gospel to be included. The apostle in this passage refers only to the Jewish worship; as is evident from the preceding part of the chapter; particularly from the ninth verse. That evangelical baptism was in use as an institution of Christ, when this epistle was written, is abundantly manifest from the following chapter, verses 19—22, particularly from the two last of these verses. *Having a high-priest,* says the apostle, *over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith; having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water;* or in other words, being baptized.

The same persons endeavour to support their opinion also from 1 Pet. iii. 21; *The like figure whereunto, even baptism, doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience towards God), by the resurrection of Christ.* But the objectors are

not less unhappy in their construction of this passage, than of that mentioned above. The true as well as obvious meaning in this passage is the following: "Baptism, the antitype of the water of the deluge, doth now save us by the resurrection of Christ; not indeed the cleansing of the filth of the flesh, but that which is signified by it; the answer of a good conscience towards God." This passage is a direct recognition of the existence of baptism as an institution in the Christian church; and therefore, instead of being a support, is a refutation of the scheme in question.

Persons who deny the doctrine of the Trinity, or the satisfaction of Christ, are in a sense constrained to deny baptism also, in order to preserve consistency in their opinions. The command, *to baptize in or into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost,* is a plain, unanswerable exhibition of the doctrine of the TRINITY. The cleansing with water also, is too unequivocal a symbol of our spiritual purification by the blood of Christ, to suffer any rational denial or doubt. It seems therefore scarcely possible for those, who deny either the Trinity or the atonement, to admit the institution of baptism, without a plain contradiction in their principles.

Others still have removed both baptism and the Lord's supper, by the aid of spiritual or mystical construction. These persons appear to build their scheme especially on the answer of John the Baptist to the Pharisees and Sadducees who came to his baptism. *I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance; but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear. He will baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire.* From this passage chiefly the doctrine has been drawn, that baptism with water was not intended to be, nor actually made by Christ, an institution of the gospel. It is hardly necessary to remark, that this interpretation of the Baptist's words is wholly erroneous; and that they have no connexion with the doctrine to which they are here applied.

The proof on which this institution rests, as a perpetual ordinance of Christ in his church, is so entire, and so obvious, that every doubt concerning it is more properly an object of surprise than of serious opposition. In the text

Christ commands his apostles and all his succeeding ministers, to baptize those whom they should make disciples. In obedience to this command, the apostles accordingly baptized all those who were made disciples by *them*. Those who followed them in the ministry, followed them also in this practice. In this manner the institution has been continued in the church, with the exception of a few dissentients, to the present time. *Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. To be born of water* is to be *baptized. To be born of the Spirit* is to be *regenerated. The kingdom of God* is a phrase used in the gospel in a twofold sense; and denotes *his visible and his invisible kingdom;* or *the collection of apparent and the collection of real saints.* The indispensable condition of entering the former, or visible kingdom, is here made by our Saviour baptism. The indispensable qualification for admission into the invisible kingdom is regeneration: the great act of the Spirit of God, which constitutes men real saints. Baptism therefore is here made by Christ a condition absolutely necessary to our authorized entrance into his visible church.

II. *I shall now inquire into the intention of this ordinance.*

Washing with water is the most natural and universal mode of cleansing from external impurities; and is therefore the most obvious and proper symbol of internal or spiritual purification. Baptism denotes generally this purification; and particularly is intended to present to us *the cleansing of the soul by the blood of Christ;* and still more particularly, *by the affusion of the divine Spirit.* To this interpretation of it we are directed by the prophet Isaiah, in the forty-fourth chapter of his prophecy, *I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring.* The same explanation is given of it also by God in the prophet Ezekiel, chap. xxxvi. 25—27, *Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes.* As both these passages refer to the evangelical dispensation, there can be no reasonable doubt that

the application here made of them is just; or that baptism especially signifies the affusion of the Spirit of God upon the soul.

It is however to be very carefully remarked here, that although baptism is a symbol of this affusion, and of the regeneration which is its consequence, *yet baptism neither ensures nor proves regeneration.* The church of Rome has long taught, that regeneration is inseparably connected with this ordinance; and that the ordinance is absolutely necessary, at least in all ordinary circumstances, to the existence of regeneration. From that church this scheme has spread, with some variations, through several Protestant churches. I know not that it is in my power to express in precise language the different views entertained in the Christian world concerning this subject.

Often, if I mistake not, these views are given to us in phraseology which is indefinite, and sometimes perhaps designedly mysterious. A distinction unknown to the Scriptures is sometimes made between *regeneration* and *renovation.* Baptism is sometimes said to be the cause, or the inseparable attendant, of regeneration, and not of renovation. What the word regeneration thus used intends, I confess myself unable to determine. So far as I have been able to find, *the regeneration of the Scriptures is but one thing;* and denotes invariably *that change of character,* or *the cause of that change, by which sinners become holy.* Christ has taught us, that to be born again is to be born of the Spirit of God. *Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Except a man be born of water, and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.* These two declarations, every person will see, are exactly parallel. *To be born again,* in the first of them, *is precisely the same thing as to be born of water and of the Spirit* in the last. *To be born of water,* as here intended, *is,* in my view, *to be baptized;* and is as absolutely necessary to our lawful admission into the *visible* kingdom of God; as *to be born of the Spirit is to our admission into his invisible kingdom.* That to be born of water and of the Spirit, is the same thing with being born again, must be admitted by every one who is willing that our Saviour should speak good sense, since he obviously mentions in this whole discourse but

one birth; which he introduces to Nicodemus under the phraseology of being born again. What connexion water, here in my view standing for baptism, has with this subject, I shall farther explain hereafter.

With these things premised, I shall now proceed to consider the question, *Whether baptism ensures or proves regeneration?*

The arguments in favour of the affirmative answer to this question are principally, if not wholly, derived from the following passages of Scripture.

First. Mark xvi. 16, *He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.*

Of this passage it is only necessary to observe, that the concluding clause refutes the supposition which the introductory one is employed to support. Here Christ declares, that he who believeth not, whether baptized or not, shall be damned. This could not be true if baptism and regeneration were thus connected.

Secondly. *The same doctrine is argued from the passage quoted above. Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.*

The account given of the subject in this text is exactly the same with that contained in the preceding passage. To be baptized is to be born of water. To be a believer is to be born of the Spirit. He who believeth, whether baptized or not, shall be saved; he that is born of the Spirit, whether born of water or not, shall enter into the invisible kingdom of God. In exact accordance with this construction of the passage, our Saviour, in every other part of his discourse with Nicodemus, insists only on being born of the Spirit, as the great qualification for acceptance with God.

It is however to be observed here, that he who, understanding the nature and authority of this institution, refuses to be baptized, will never enter either the visible or invisible kingdom of God. As he refuses to become a member of the visible, he will certainly be shut out of the invisible, kingdom. Considered with reference to a case of this nature, the passage may be justly construed in the literal manner. For he who persists in this act of rebellion against the authority of Christ, will never belong to his kingdom.

Thirdly. *This doctrine is also argued from Titus* iii. 5.

According to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost.

Whether the words translated *the washing of regeneration* denote baptism or not, according to the opinions of different commentators, is in my view immaterial to the present question. If baptism is denoted by these words, it is called the washing of regeneration, because it is symbolical of that change in the heart; and because Christ has established it as such a symbol in his visible church. Beyond this *nothing* can be pleaded from this passage in favour of the doctrine.

There is yet another text, to wit, Eph. v. 26, of an import similar to that last quoted, which may be urged with somewhat less plausibility, as favouring the same scheme. It is this, *As Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word.* To this the same answer is obviously to be given with that which has been already given to the passage last quoted.

These are the only texts within my knowledge which can be seriously alleged in favour of this doctrine. I shall now therefore proceed to shew, that the doctrine is erroneous by the following considerations.

1. *It contradicts the general tenor of the Scriptures relative to this subject.*

In the first place, *adults are in the Scriptures required to believe antecedently to their baptism.*

In the text, the apostles are directed to make disciples of all nations, and then to baptize them. That they understood their commission in this manner, is unanswerably evident from their own declarations. *Repent therefore,* said St. Peter to the Jews, *and be baptized every one of you in the name of the Lord Jesus.* When the eunuch said to Philip, *See, here is water, what doth hinder me to be baptized?* Philip replied, *If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. Lydia* was baptized after *the Lord had opened her heart. The jailer* was baptized in consequence of his faith. So was *Paul.* So were *Cornelius and his household.* From these facts and declarations it is evident beyond controversy, that *adults were baptized by the apostles after they had become, or were supposed to have become, disciples*

of Christ: or in other words, after they were either really or apparently regenerated.

Secondly. *The Scriptures teach us, that the gospel, or the truth of God, is the great instrument of regeneration.*

The truth shall make you free, saith our Saviour, John viii. 32. *Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth,* John xvii. 17. *Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth,* says St. James. James i. 18. *Being born again,* says St. Peter, *not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God.* 1 Pet. i. 23. *The gospel,* says St. Paul, *is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.* Rom. i. 16. Again, *It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.* 1 Cor. i. 21. Again; *In Christ Jesus have I begotten you through the gospel.* 1 Cor. iv. 15.

Thirdly. *The Scriptures expressly declare, that baptism is not the great instrument of regeneration.*

This is directly declared by St. Peter, in a passage already quoted for another purpose, in this discourse, from the third chapter of his First Epistle, verse 21. *The like figure whereunto, even baptism, doth now save us; not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience towards God.* In this passage St. Peter teaches, that the putting away of the filth of the flesh is not, and that the answer of a good conscience is, the means of our salvation. In other words, baptism is not, but the virtuous character, which is the effect of regeneration, is, the means of eternal life to mankind. This character, I have already shewn, is so far from being the consequence of baptism, that every adult candidate for this ordinance is required to possess it before he can be lawfully baptized according to the Scriptures.

In perfect accordance with this declaration of St. Peter, St. Paul declares, *circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing; but keeping the commandments of God.* To Jews, of whom there was a considerable number in the Corinthian church, circumcision was a seal of the righteousness of faith; just in the same manner as baptism now is to Christians. It had also all the influence towards regeneration which baptism now possesses. But had it ensured or proved regeneration with respect to the Jews who

were in the church at Corinth, the apostle would not, when writing to them, have declared it to be nothing. For in this case it would to them have been the means of that holiness, in the exercise of which they would have *kept the commandments of God.* What is true of circumcision in this respect, is, I apprehend, precisely true of baptism also.

But this point is placed beyond all reasonable debate by the following declarations of St. Paul. 1 Cor. i. 14. 17; *I thank God that I baptized none of you but Crispus and Gaius. For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel.* Nothing is more certain than that, if baptism ensures or proves regeneration, Paul, who so ardently desired the salvation of mankind, and wished to become as extensively as possible the instrument of their salvation, could not thank God, that he baptized none of the Corinthians, but Gaius, Crispus, and the household of Stephanus. To him it would comparatively have been a matter of indifference, whether they accused him of baptizing in his own name or not. Of what consequence could the clamour, the disputes, or the divisions, be, which might arise about this subject, compared with the salvation on the one hand, and on the other with the perdition, of the Corinthians? Instead of thanking God in this manner, he would have baptized every Corinthian who would have permitted him; and, like a Romish missionary, have compelled crowds and hosts to the streams and rivers in the neighbourhood, that they might receive this ordinance at his hands. With still less propriety could he say, if baptism were the means of regeneration, especially if it ensured or proved it, that *Christ sent him not to baptize, but to preach the gospel.* Christ, as he himself hath told us, sent Paul to the Gentiles, and to the Corinthians as well as other Gentiles, *to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God.* Acts xxvi. 17, 18. In other words, Christ sent Paul to the Gentiles to accomplish their regeneration. But if baptism be the means of regeneration, or be accompanied by it, then Christ actually sent him to baptize, in direct contradiction to the passage just now quoted. From both these passages it is clearly evident, that baptism neither ensures nor proves regeneration.

2. *This doctrine is contradicted by experience.*

Such persons as have been baptized in modes and by ministers, altogether unexceptionable in the view of such as hold this scheme, have by their fruits, the great scriptural touchstone, proved themselves to be unregenerated. Simon Magus, Hymenæus, Philetus, Phygellus, and Hermogenes, were all probably baptized by inspired ministers. By ministers possessing authority equally unexceptionable, were baptized those gross transgressors in *the seven churches of Asia* so severely reproved by Christ in the second and third chapters of the Apocalypse. It will not be pretended, that these men were regenerated.

Equally conclusive to the same point is the experience of every succeeding age in the Christian church. Nothing is more certain, than that a multitude of those who have been baptized by such as the abettors of this scheme will acknowledge to be authorized ministers, have, in every Christian age and country, been guilty of such continual and gross sins, as have proved beyond a doubt, that instead of being regenerated, they were *in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity*. Great numbers of such are found in every class of nominal Christians under heaven. Nothing can more perfectly demonstrate, that baptism is not accompanied by regeneration.

It will probably be here replied, that regeneration may be actually conveyed to the souls of the baptized, and yet its influence be lost by their future apostacy; or what is often called falling from grace; either because *they are not confirmed*, or for some other reason.

To this I answer in the first place, *that no such apostacy is known in the Scriptures*. This position, if I mistake not, has been proved in a former discourse concerning the perseverance of such as are regenerated. *He that heareth my word*, said our Saviour to the Jews, John v. 24, *and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is* (has) *passed from death unto life.*

Secondly. *The Scriptures no where teach the doctrine or duty of confirmation as necessary to the continuance of mankind in holiness; nor as an ordinance of the Christian church in any sense.*

Thirdly. *Multitudes of baptized persons give the most un-*

questionable evidence from their baptism, or if infants, from their first possession of moral agency, that they are sinners only.

Fourthly. *Immediately after their confirmation, they continue to exhibit the same sinful character, and exhibit it through life.*

Thus, in every point of view, the doctrine that baptism is regeneration, that it ensures or proves that it is attended or followed by it, either regularly or commonly, is erroneous, unfounded, and unscriptural. So far is this from being the doctrine of the Scriptures, that, according to them, adults can never offer themselves for baptism unless already regenerated. *The answer of a good conscience,* spoken of by St. Peter, cannot be given by him who is not regenerated.

In the ancient periods of the church, as we are informed by Tertullian, the minister asked the candidate for baptism, "*Dost thou renounce Satan? Dost thou believe in Christ?*" The candidate answered, "*I renounce, I believe.*" This Tertullian calls "*sponsionem salutis;*" "*an engagement of salvation;*" and says that "*the soul is consecrated not by washing but by answering.*" To this practice, St. Peter is supposed to refer in the text repeatedly quoted on this subject. But it is evident that no person who is unregenerated can declare with truth, *that he renounces Satan, and believes in Christ.* Thus no such person can give this answer of a good conscience; or lawfully receive the ordinance of baptism.

The case of infants will be more particularly considered hereafter. It will be sufficient to observe at the present time, that, although God hath required believing parents to dedicate their children to him in baptism, he has no where promised, that they shall be regenerated either in or by the administration of this ordinance. Accordingly, a great multitude of the circumcised children of the Israelites, and of the baptized children of Christians, in every age and church, have plainly lived and died unregenerated. It may here be added, that very high evidence is necessary to convince a sober man, that God has, in this manner, placed the salvation of mankind in the hands and under control of their fellow-men. To me it appears evident, that the clergy of the *Romish church* taught this doctrine, su-

premely, if not solely, to extend their own domination, and to place mankind at their feet. He, whose agency becomes indispensable to the salvation of others, he who can confer salvation on others, will, so far as this power is admitted, bring them universally under subjection to his pleasure. No man in his senses will question the decisions of him who can give or refuse salvation. Is it credible, that such stupendous power should be placed in human hands?

But although baptism neither ensures nor proves the regeneration of the person who receives this ordinance, it is still an institution of high importance to the Christian church; and *that* in a great variety of respects. Particularly,

1. *It is a solemn, visible exhibition of these two great scriptural doctrines;* THE EXPIATION OF SIN, AND THE CLEANSING OF THE SOUL, BY THE BLOOD OF CHRIST; AND ITS RENOVATION BY THE SPIRIT OF GOD.

When these doctrines have been learned and understood by the reading or preaching of the gospel, so that the mind has become well acquainted with their nature and importance; it is prepared to discern the real import of this ordinance. In this situation, the ordinance of baptism becomes, in a high degree, subsidiary to the preaching of the gospel. It now teaches the same inestimable truths which were before taught by the preacher; and teaches them with a force peculiar and pre-eminent.

It is a truth known to all men, that the objects of our senses make an impression on our minds far more striking, influential, and enduring, than those of the understanding. When these objects are made symbolical, and are thus employed to declare evangelical truths; especially when the symbols are near and obvious, and therefore disclose the truths in a clear and indubitable manner; the truths actually disclosed are invested with all the force of sensible impressions. When an adult is the subject of baptism; the great truths which I have specified are brought home to his heart with supreme efficacy: and he is enabled, at least in ordinary circumstances, to feel the glory and excellence of forgiving, redeeming, and sanctifying love, in a degree and with a benefit which no words

can accomplish. What is true of an adult in these circumstances, is true, probably in a still more affecting and profitable manner, of parents dedicating their children to God in this solemn ordinance. Perhaps there is not in the world a sight more interesting, than that of an infant offered up by believing parents to God in baptism. The helpless circumstances of the child; the peculiar tenderness of the relation existing between it and the parents; the strong expression of their faith in God, in giving up their beloved offspring to him, devoting it to his service, and engaging to train it up for his glory; the exhibition of their reliance on the blood of Christ, and the agency of the Spirit of truth, to cleanse it from its original pollution; the affecting manifestation of the divine mercy and goodness in permitting us thus to offer up our children to God; united with the solemnities of the day, the place, and the occasion; form a combination of facts, and doctrines, and duties, scarcely paralleled in the present world. On the minds of the parents particularly the impressions made cannot fail, unless through very gross stupidity, or gross wickedness, of powerfully persuading them to the duties involved in this dedication. Of the same nature are the impressions which will very naturally be made on those who are present at the administration. Persons heretofore dedicated to God in baptism will naturally feel anew their own baptismal obligations: while those who have dedicated them will realize also the privileges to which they and their offspring have been admitted, the engagements which they have made, and the duties which in a peculiar manner they are required to perform.

In all these points of view, the ordinance of baptism is of high importance to the Christian church; and fitted to impress the great truths of the gospel upon the mind in the happiest manner. It is here to be remembered, that as religious education is constituted in the Christian church a primary mean of salvation, so the ordinance of baptism is invested with a peculiar importance, from the intimate and acknowledged connexion between the act of devoting a child to God in this manner, and the duty of educating him for the service of his Maker, and the attainment of eternal life. No two religious employments are, in this country at

least, and probably in most others throughout Christendom, more universally understood to be inseparably connected, than the act of giving up a child to God, and the duty of educating him for his service. The most solemn sense of the obligations which we are under to train up our children for God, is probably derived from the administration of this ordinance.

2. *When children die in infancy, and are scripturally dedicated to God in baptism; there is much and very consoling reason furnished to believe, that they are accepted beyond the grave.*

We are taught in the Scriptures, that *praise is perfected out of the mouths of babes and sucklings.* It is perhaps improper to say, that praise is perfected on this side of heaven. When little children were brought to our Saviour, he said, *Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven.* This seems to be a plain declaration, that children are admitted to this kingdom, and constitute not a small part of the persons of whom it is composed. *The promise,* said St. Peter to the Jews, *is to you, and to your children.* If this promise is extended, in any sense, to those who die in infancy, and conveys to them any blessings; they must be found beyond the grave.

There is, I think, reason to hope well concerning other children dying in infancy. But there is certainly peculiar reason for Christian parents to entertain strong consolation with respect to *their* offspring; whom God has not only permitted, but required, them to offer up to him in this ordinance, pointing so extensively and so significantly to their purification.

3. *Those who are baptized in infancy, are placed under the guardianship and discipline of the Christian church.*

The manner in which this discipline is to be conducted will be the subject of a future discussion. It will be sufficient to observe at the present time, that children to whom this ordinance has been dispensed, are by these means doubly assured of the certain and inestimable benefits of religious education; and are entitled, in a peculiar manner, to the counsel, the reproof, the conversation, the example, and the prayers, of Christians.

The importance of these blessings every Christian will understand. Nor can those who believe the declaration, that *he who walketh with wise men shall be wise,* fail to acknowledge them as blessings of inestimable value.

4. *Baptism is also the public sign by which the disciples of Christ are known to each other, and to the world.*

All societies need indispensably some mark of distinction; some mode, in which the respective members shall be known to each other; so that each individual shall feel, that he himself is required, and that he is invested with a plain right to require others, to perform the several duties incumbent on him and them as members of the fraternity. This sign ought always to be publicly known; definite; unequivocal; solemn; significant; safe from being counterfeited; always the same; acknowledged by all the members of the body; and therefore established by authority which cannot be disputed. The power of such a sign to unite the members of such a body in affection to each other, in a common interest, and in corresponding pursuits, is incalculably great. A mere name often forms a party in politics, and in religion; and engages those who often have very imperfect conceptions, if they conceive at all, of the party purposes for which they are embarked, in a harmony with each other, and in a course of zeal and violence against their fellow-men, wonderful both in degree and continuance, and productive of effects, usually great, and often dreadful. Here the sign is the seal of God; set by his own authority upon those who in this world are visibly his children. It has all the properties mentioned above: and is possessed of more efficacy than can be easily comprehended, and incomparably more than is usually mistrusted, to keep Christians united, alive, and active, in the great duties of religion, and in the great interest of the church of God.

5. *Baptism, as a symbol, holds out, in a very forcible manner, to those who have been intrusted in the Christian religion, a great part of those doctrines and duties which are purely Christian; or which belong to Christians, as such.*

Of this number particularly are the doctrines of *regeneration; justification by the righteousness of Christ; adop-*

tion; sanctification; the gratitude, complacency, and obedience, to God; the faith in Christ; the hope of salvation by him; and *that love to the brethren by which all are known to be his disciples;* which together form so great a part of Christian doctrines, and the Christian character. The doctrine of *adoption* particularly is presented to us in this ordinance with peculiar clearness and force. Concerning this subject however I have had occasion heretofore to make all the observations which I thought necessary.

With all these doctrines is intimately connected that *of the depravity of our nature.* A serious observer is perhaps hardly ever a witness of the administration of this ordinance, without strongly realizing the existence of that moral pollution which is symbolically washed away by baptism. The baptism of infants particularly exhibits this subject in the strongest light. Here we see, that our race, in the view of their Creator, indispensably need the cleansing which is accomplished by the blood of Christ, and the renewing power of the Holy Ghost, antecedently to their possible commission of sin by voluntary acts. Their original corruption is therefore taught by this ordinance in language which cannot be misconstrued; and is impressed upon us with singular force by its solemn and significant symbols.

Many other doctrines, duties, and blessings, are evidently and impressively presented to us in the administration of baptism. But to expatiate upon these, and even to point them out, is the business of a treatise, and not of a single sermon.

6. *The ordinance of baptism, as a memorial of the death of Christ, exhibits powerful and immoveable evidence of that great fact to the Christian church, throughout all the successive periods of its existence.*

As I shall have occasion to resume this subject when I come to discourse upon the Lord's supper, I shall defer my observations upon it for the present; and shall conclude this discourse with two

REMARKS.

1. *It is not a little to be regretted, that this ordinance is so rarely made a theme of discussion in the desk.*

It is not unusual for a minister of the gospel to devote twenty-four sermons annually to the consideration of the Lord's supper; twelve delivered at what, in this country, is commonly styled the sacramental lecture, and twelve more on the sabbaths consecrated to the administration of this sacrament. On baptism, at the same time, ministers rarely preach. Perhaps it is no unreasonable supposition, that the subjects of this discourse are now, for the first time, brought out in the desk to the consideration of a great part of this audience. Why such a difference is made between two institutions of Christ, invested with the same authority, solemnity, and influence, I am unable to determine. But whatever may be the ground of this distinction, I am satisfied that it cannot be a good one. There is but too much reason to believe, that not only the persons, particularly the children, who have been baptized, but the parents also are, in many instances, lamentably ignorant of the nature of this institution, the truths which it declares, the duties which it involves, and the privileges which it confers. Were these things made more frequently subjects of preaching; were they clearly illustrated, and solemnly enforced; there is the best reason to believe, that it would become a far richer and more extensive blessing to mankind.

2. *Persons baptized in their infancy are here solemnly reminded of their own peculiar duties; and severely reproved for their negligence in performing them.*

How many persons are now in this house, who have been dedicated to God by baptism in their infancy, and who yet never thought of a single privilege, realized a single obligation, nor performed a single duty, created by this ordinance! It is perhaps questionable, whether some of them are not now ignorant, whether they have been baptized or not. How melancholy are these facts! How full are they of shame and sin! How productive ought they to be of remorse, contrition, and amendment! God has called you, my young friends, into his visible kingdom in the morning of life. He has publicly sealed you as his children; and planted you in the nursery of his church. Remember, that this interesting event sprang not from chance, *nor* from *the will of the flesh, nor* from *the will of man, but* from *God.*

He gave your parents the disposition and the right to offer you up to him, and to consecrate you to his service. He has publicly acknowledged his particular relation to you; and given you this illustrious token of his kindness and mercy. Think then, I beseech you, of the guilt of disregarding or neglecting this testimony of his mercy to you. All men are bound voluntarily to become his, and to consecrate themselves to his service. To this duty you are under peculiar obligations. By openly acknowledging you as his children, he has, if I may be allowed the expression, laid claim to you in a manner which, while it demands of you the most intense gratitude, requires of you also to assume the character which he has thus externally conferred; and with all the heart to devote yourselves in the covenant of grace to his service and glory. All men, under the gospel, are immoveably bound to the performance of this duty. But the obligations incumbent on you are peculiar and pre-eminent. Let me request you to ponder this subject with deep and solemn concern; and to inquire with all earnestness of mind, whether you are not in imminent danger of sharing the doom of Capernaum, Chorazin, and Bethsaida.

SERMON CLVII.

THE EXTRAORDINARY MEANS OF GRACE.

THE OBJECTIONS AGAINST INFANT BAPTISM ANSWERED.

Go ye therefore, teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.—MATT. XXVIII. 19.

IN the preceding discourse I considered, at some length, the *reality and intention* of the ordinance of baptism. According to the scheme then proposed, I shall now proceed to inquire, *who are the proper subjects of baptism?*

In answer to this inquiry I observe,

1. *That all those who believe in Christ, and publicly profess their faith in him, are proper subjects of baptism.*

That such a profession may be made with understanding, the person who makes it must be of sufficient age and sufficient capacity to know the great doctrines and duties of the gospel; and must already have become acquainted with them. He must also understand, that it is the religion of the heart which is professed, and not merely a speculative belief of the truths and precepts contained in the Scriptures. Without such knowledge no man can act, in this solemn case, with propriety, decency, or meaning. Nor do I know, that the absolute necessity of such knowledge has ever been questioned. A public declaration of our cordial belief in the doctrines and precepts of the gospel, is what is usually called in this country a *profession of faith*, the ground on which indispensably adults are admitted to baptism.

In addition to this, what is equally necessary to such admission, the candidate also enters publicly into covenant with God, *avouching* JEHOVAH, *the* FATHER, *the* SON, *and the* HOLY GHOST, to be his GOD; giving himself up to the FATHER, through the SON, and by the HOLY GHOST, as his child and servant; and engaging that, *denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, he will live soberly, righteously, and godly, in the world.* This engagement is substantially what Tertullian calls *sponsio salutis; the engagement of salvation;* made universally by adults who were baptized in his time.

One would think it hardly necessary to observe concerning this engagement, *that it ought to be made with sincerity;* or that *the candidate ought to mean all that which is ordinarily intended by the terms of the profession;* or in other words, that *it ought to be made with the heart, and not merely with the lips.*

2. *The infant children of believers are also scriptural subjects of baptism.*

This doctrine, as you well know, has been extensively disputed and denied; so extensively, that those who have contended against it have been formed into a distinct sect, existing in considerable numbers throughout most Christian countries. These persons, originally styled Anabaptists, and Antipædobaptists, have claimed to themselves improperly the title of Baptists; indicating, that they only baptized, or were baptized, in a manner agreeable to the scrip-

tural directions on this subject. While therefore I cheerfully acknowledge the distinguished piety and respectability of a considerable number of men in this class of Christians, particularly in Great Britain, I protest against their assumption of this name, so far as it is intended to indicate, that others do not baptize, and are not baptized, agreeably to the principles of the gospel. I acknowledge freely their right to their own principles. But their right to conclude or to assert, that the point in debate between us and them, is settled in their favour, I neither admit nor believe. The name Anabaptist, originally given to them because they rebaptized those who had received baptism in infancy, is an appellation in every view less objectionable.

In discussing this subject, *I shall state and answer the objections commonly made against it; and then attempt to support it by direct arguments.*

1. *It is objected by the opposers of this doctrine, that it is not enjoined by any express command, or warranted by any express declaration, in the Scriptures.*

How far this objection is founded in truth I shall consider hereafter. At present it will be sufficient to observe, that there are many duties incumbent on us which are neither expressly commanded nor expressly declared in the Scriptures. The principle on which the objection is founded, when expressed generally, is this: *Nothing is our duty which is not thus commanded or declared in the Scriptures.* According to this principle, *women are under no obligations to celebrate the Lord's supper; parents to pray with their children or families, or to teach them to read; nor any of mankind to celebrate the Christian sabbath; nor rulers to provide the means of defending the country which they govern, or to punish a twentieth part of those crimes which, if left unpunished, would ruin any country.* The extent to which this principle fairly pursued would conduct us, would I think astonish even those by whom it is urged.

It is impossible for the Scriptures, if they would be of any serious use to mankind, to specify all the particular doctrines and duties necessary to be believed and practised. The volumes in which such a specification, however succinct, must be made, would be too numerous even to be read, much more to be understood and remembered. The

scheme of instruction adopted by the Scriptures, is that of stating the objects of our faith and the rules of our duty in a manner which, taken together, may be styled general; although I acknowledge it is, in many instances, to a considerable degree, particular. These it illustrates by examples, and frequently by comments on those examples. Both the instructions and examples also are intended to be still farther illustrated by a comparison of passages. Common sense candidly employed, may easily, with these advantages, discover all those precepts which direct the faith and practice of mankind in ordinary cases. Those which in their nature are more involved, are left to the investigation of superior intelligence and laborious study.

Such a code of instruction every man of thought will perceive must lay a foundation for a great multitude of inferences. Of these, some will be distant and doubtful; others variously probable; and others still near and certain. Those which are included in the last of these classes, are ever to be received as being actually contained in the Scriptures, and as directing our faith and practice with divine authority. Every scriptural writer, by attaching this authority to his own inferences, teaches us this doctrine, and enforces upon us the duty of yielding obedience to inferences clearly and certainly drawn from truths and precepts expressed in the sacred canon. I will only add, that wherever our duty demands either the designed omission or the adoption of any given practice, we are obliged, wherever we cannot obtain certain evidence, to govern ourselves by the superior probability.

If then the duty of baptizing infants can be certainly inferred, or inferred with a probability superior to that which is supposed to justify the omission of it, the Scriptures require that infants should be baptized.

2. *It is objected, that there is no certain example of infant baptism in the Scriptures.*

To this I answer, that there is no instance in which it is declared in so many terms that infants were baptized. But there are instances in which, according to every rule of rational construction, this fact is plainly involved. Lydia and *her house*, and the *household* of Stephanus, were baptized. He who has examined the meaning of the words *house*

and *household* in the Scriptures cannot fail to perceive, that in their primary meaning they denote *children*, and sometimes *more remote descendants*. Thus St. Paul said to the jailer, in answer to his question, *What must I do to be saved? Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ; and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.* There is no reason to think that Paul knew what family the jailer had. On the contrary, he appears merely to have uttered the same doctrine which had before been announced to the Jews by St. Peter; *The promise is to you, and to your children;* and to have used the word *house* necessarily from this ignorance in the manner in which it was customarily used by his countrymen. Of this manner we have many examples in the Old Testament. *Come, thou, and all thy house, into the ark,* said God to Noah; Genesis vii. 1. We know that the *house of Noah* consisted of his wife and children. *Let thy house be like the house of Pharez,* said the elders of Bethlehem to Boaz; Ruth iv. 12. In this passage the meaning is precisely limited to children. *I rent the kingdom away from the house of David; I will bring evil upon the house of Jeroboam; I will take away the remnant of the house of Jeroboam. The Lord shall raise him up a king who shall cut off the house of Jeroboam;* 1 Kings viii. 10—14. *I will make thy house like the house of Jeroboam,* and *like the house of Baasha, the son of Ahijah;* 1 Kings xvi. 3, xxi. 22. In all these passages, and in others almost innumerable, the children only are meant. Thus the house of Israel, the house of Judah, the house of Joseph, are phrases exactly synonymous with the children of Israel, the children of Judah, and the children of Joseph. In this manner then Paul unquestionably used the term in the passage already quoted. Accordingly it is subjoined, *He was baptized, and all his, straightway.*

In the same manner is the phrase used by St. Peter, in reciting the directions of the angel to Cornelius; *Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter, who shall tell thee words whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved.* Acts xi. 13, 14.

When therefore we find the *houses* of these several persons baptized, we know, that the language customarily, and therefore in the several cases certainly, means the *children* of those who are mentioned. When St. Paul said to

the jailer, *Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house;* he intended, either that the children of the jailer should be saved; or his servants; or both. I am willing to leave it to my opponents to choose that side of either alternative which they prefer: for they themselves will be compelled to admit, that the children are at least included.

From the manner in which the baptizing of these families is mentioned, it appears strongly probable, that *to baptize men and their households was the standing practice of the apostles:* for there is nothing which indicates, that they practised differently in these instances from what was common in others. And St. Paul declares to the jailer, that, in consequence of his own faith, he and all his house should be saved. Should this however be contested, there is strong reason to believe, that in some or other of these families, and not improbably in all, there were children too young to be baptized on their own profession of faith.

3. *It is objected, that children cannot be the subjects of faith; and that faith is a necessary qualification for baptism.*

I know not how far this objection is urged: but it is certainly not founded in truth. John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb; and was unquestionably a subject of faith in such a manner, that had he died in infancy, he would certainly have been received to heaven. What was true of him, can be true of any other infant. The objection therefore is founded in error.

4. *It is objected also, that infants cannot make a profession of faith; and that such a profession is a necessary qualification for baptism.*

That infants are unable to make a profession of faith is obvious; but that such a profession is a necessary qualification for baptism in all instances cannot be proved. Cornelius, *and they that were with him,* made no such profession. No profession was demanded by St. Peter: nor were any questions asked concerning the subject. They indeed gave evidence, and God furnished evidence for them, that they were true disciples of Christ. *The Holy Ghost fell on them; and they spake with tongues, and magnified God.*

These facts, and not a profession of faith, are alleged by St. Peter as the reason why he baptized them. Acts xi. 15—17.

This conduct of Peter, which was directed by the Holy Ghost, is clearly expressive of the pleasure of God concerning this subject: and proves beyond debate, that a profession is not always necessary, nor always required, as a qualification for baptism. The objection therefore is not founded in truth.

A profession is required as evidence of the faith and piety of the candidate. Whenever therefore such evidence is complete without it, the profession, so far as this end is concerned, is of no use. In ordinary cases a profession is indispensable to an adult, as a proof of his fitness for the reception of this sacrament; and at the present time is indispensable in all cases where adults are concerned; because, as I have shewn in a former discourse, it is required in the Scriptures; and because it furnishes important evidence of their character as proper candidates for baptism. But if God has exhibited a part of mankind as proper candidates for this ordinance by an institution of his own, and has not required a profession of them, the use of a profession and the right of demanding it, so far as *they* are concerned, is taken away: their fitness for baptism being completely proved in another manner.

It is however true, that infidels are baptized in consequence of a profession of faith; but it is the profession of their parents; not their own.

5. *It is farther objected, that persons baptized in infancy prove, that they were improper candidates for this ordinance by the future degeneracy of their conduct.*

The real amount of this objection is, *that no persons can be proper subjects of baptism to the human eye, who after their reception of this sacrament prove themselves to be unrenewed.*

This objection fails, because it proves too much. It proves, not only that adults, who are candidates for this ordinance, are often improper subjects of it, but that the rules given in the Scriptures for our direction concerning this subject are insufficient and useless. If we are required to baptize none but those who are regenerated; it is

absolutely necessary, that we should know whether the candidates for the sacrament are regenerated or not. But this no scriptural rule enables us to know, even in a single instance. All scriptural rules therefore concerning this subject, are on this ground destitute of any use to us; since we can never lawfully baptize. The apostles themselves certainly did not always know; for they baptized *Hymenæus, Philetus,* and *others,* who afterward proved themselves to be sinners. According to this objection, therefore, the apostles acted with plain impropriety.

Should it be granted then, as it must be, that ministers act lawfully and scripturally in baptizing some persons, who afterward plainly appear to be unregenerated; the objection fails, and is given up; since the objector concedes the very point for which he contends; to wit, that regeneration is indispensable in the candidate in order that he may be lawfully baptized. The truth obviously is, this objection is founded in gross error.

The rules given by God alone render baptism lawful in any case. No qualifications in any person render him a proper candidate for baptism in any other sense, than as they place him within these rules. Without these rules, regeneration would not render his baptism lawful. With them we are to accord in every case; and are to ask no questions concerning any thing except what they require.

6. *It is objected farther, that all baptized persons are, by that class of Christians to whom I have attached myself, considered as members of the Christian church; yet those who are baptized in infancy, are not treated as if they possessed this character. Particularly, they are not admitted to the sacramental supper; nor made objects of ecclesiastical discipline.*

As this objection has, in my own view, a more serious import than any other which has been alleged, it deserves a particular consideration.

In the first place, *I acknowledge without hesitation, that the conduct of those with whom I am in immediate communion, and so far as I know them their opinions also, with regard to this subject, are, in a greater or less degree, errors, and indefensible.*

Many of the churches of this country, and many of its

ministers also, appear to me to have judged and acted with less accuracy, with less of scheme and comprehensiveness, concerning this subject, than concerning most others. I certainly do not intend to injure either churches or ministers by this remark; and persuade myself that I do not. A considerable number of ministers have expressed to me their own dissatisfaction, with both the views and the practice of both themselves and their fellow-Christians, with respect to persons baptized in infancy. I am equally dissatisfied with my own former views and practice respecting this subject; and readily admit, that a part of what is contained in this objection is justly chargeable on many churches and many ministers who hold the doctrine of infant baptism. But it lies only against the *errors of men who adopt this doctrine,* and not against the *doctrine itself.*

That infants should be baptized, and then be left by ministers and churches in a situation undistinguishable from that of other children, appears to me irreconcilable with any scriptural views of the nature and importance of this sacrament.

Secondly. *If baptized infants are members of the Christian church; I think we are bound to determine and declare the nature and extent of their membership, as it exists in our view.*

That they are members of the Christian church, if lawfully baptized, I fully believe. All persons are baptized not *in,* but *into,* the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: that is, they are in this ordinance publicly and solemnly introduced into the family, and entitled in a peculiar manner to the name, of God. Accordingly they are called *godly; Christians; spiritual; sons and daughters of God, and children of God;* throughout the Scriptures. That this is the true construction of the passage just quoted is, I think, obvious from the Greek phraseology, εις το ονομα, the proper English of which is, *into the name.* Accordingly it is customarily rendered in this manner, by the translators of our Bible, in those passages where the same subject is mentioned. Thus, Rom. vi. 34, St. Paul asks, *Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized* INTO *Jesus Christ were baptized* INTO *his death.*

Therefore we are buried with him by baptism INTO *death.* 1 Cor. xii. 13; *For by one spirit we were all baptized* INTO *one body.* Gal. iii. 27; *As many of you as have been baptized* INTO *Christ, have put on Christ.* In all these instances the phraseology is the same with that first quoted; and from analogy teaches us, that it ought there also to have been rendered in the same manner: *into* being the original and proper meaning of the preposition; and *in,* being a meaning so uncommon, as heretofore to have been resolved into a Hebraism. Several of these passages also directly declare, that those who are baptized are baptized into Christ; that is, into the church or body of Christ. At the same time there is no other account given of this subject. Nor is there any thing in the ordinance of baptism which in any manner indicates, that adults, when baptized, are members of the church; and that baptized infants are not members.

To these observations it is to be added, that there is but one passage, in which *in the name of Christ* is joined with the verb baptize; *viz.* Acts ii. 38, where the preposition is επι. It is also to be observed, that the preposition εις is never used in any other case, where any thing is done, or said to be done, in the name of Christ: denoting, that it is done by his authority. I conclude therefore, that all those persons who have been baptized, are members of the Christian church.

Still, no persons, in my view, become members of the Christian church by the ordinance of baptism, in the sense most commonly intended by those who use this phraseology.

To make my own apprehensions concerning this subject clear to those who hear me, it will be useful to consider some of the meanings annexed to the word church. This word denotes, in the first place, *The invisible kingdom of Christ in this world; consisting of all those who are sanctified.*

Secondly; *The visible kingdom of Christ in this world; consisting of all those who have publicly professed the Christian religion,* and, in my own view, *of their baptized offspring who have not arrived at adult age.*

Thirdly; *It denotes* also *any body of Christians who*

hold the same doctrines, and are united in the same worship and discipline. Thus we speak of the church of England, of Scotland, or of Holland, of the Lutheran, Greek, and Romish churches.

Fourthly; *It denotes also any body of Christians who worship together in the same place, under the care of the same minister.*

From this account of the different meanings of the word church it is evident, that when persons baptized in infancy are said to be members of the church, the word cannot be used in all these senses. Such a person is not of course a member of the Romish church, the church of England, a Presbyterian church, the Lutheran church, or the church of Holland.

Again; A person baptized in the church of England, and communing with that church, is not of course a member of the church of Scotland, or of the Presbyterian church in America.

Once more; A person baptized in one of the churches of this state, and acknowledged as a member in regular standing, is not of course a member of another of these churches. He could claim no right to vote, or to perform any other act of membership, on the ground of his admission into some other church.

Finally; A person baptized in the house in which one of our churches customarily worships, and by its own minister, is not of course a member of that church.

A Presbyterian from Scotland may, in adult age, be conscientiously baptized by a minister of one of our churches; and yet, having no intention of becoming a communicant in that church, may never become a member of it; or, in other words, never acquire a right to perform any act of membership.

From these remarks it is perfectly plain, that something beside baptism, nay, that something beside making a profession of religion, is necessary to constitute any person a member of a particular church, or of a body of Christians, worshipping together in one place, under the care of one minister, and acting together in ecclesiastical business.

The same doctrine may be also illustrated in another manner.

Persons are not unfrequently dismissed from particular churches in good standing, and with full recommendations of their Christian character. These persons are certainly not members of any particular church or churches, until they are severally united to other churches in form. It is plain, that they can act no where as members of the church of Christ, except in what is called occasional communion.

Farther, a minister by his ordination is constituted not a minister of a particular church, but of the church of Christ at large; and is acknowledged as such by all who consider his ordination as valid. Accordingly he performs all the common duties of the ministry, wherever he is called to perform them; particularly in vacant churches, with the same propriety and authority, as in the church immediately under his care. *He becomes the minister of a particular church solely by the fact, that it is committed to him in charge by the proper ecclesiastical authority.* In accordance with this view of the subject, he is removed from the superintendance of one church, and placed over another by the same authority, as often as it is judged proper. But his ordination is never performed a second time, although the charge which conveys to him the superintendance of a particular church may be repeated several times during the course of his ministry. According to this scheme, also, individual ministers are not unfrequently ordained as evangelists; and have no particular churches committed to their care.

From all these facts it is evident, that a person may be a member of the church of Christ at large; and not a member of a particular church. A minister is a member of the church of Christ at large; but is never in the proper sense a member of a particular church. Peculiarly is this evident when he is dismissed in good standing; for then his only relation to the church heretofore under his superintendance has ceased. *An evangelist* also, that is, *a minister ordained at large, and having no particular church committed to his care,* is a minister in the church general; and is acknowledged as such by all those who acknowledge the validity of his ordination. He is not in any sense the minister of a particular church; nor in any sense a member of such a church.

When an adult offers himself for baptism, he professes his faith, and enters into covenant with God; or makes a profession of piety. He then receives baptism *as a seal on the part of God, of his own covenant with the man, and of hi sacceptance of him into his family. As this seal is voluntarily received by the man, it becomes also his own seal of his own covenant with God;* a solemn and final acknowledgment of his enrolment in the same family. He is now therefore a member of the church; and may lawfully commune at Christ's table wherever his fellow-Christians will receive him.

The eunuch who was baptized *by Philip* was in all respects in this situation. He made a profession of religion; and was baptized by an authorized minister. He was therefore a member of the Christian church; but he was a member of the church general only, and not of any particular church. He could not have acted as a member of such a church in any ecclesiastical measure; nor voted in the regulations of worship, communion, or discipline.

This I conceive to be exactly the situation of persons baptized in infancy. *They are members of the church of Christ;* that is, *of the church general.* They are members in the same sense in which the eunuch was a member; in which those dismissed in good standing, and not yet united to other churches, are members; in which men lawfully ordained are ministers of the church; in which adults after their profession and baptism are members, antecedently to their union with particular churches, *What then,* it will be asked, *constitutes persons members of particular churches?* The answer is at hand. *It is a covenant mutually made by Christians, to worship God together in the same manner, and in accordance with the same principles; and to unite together in the same friendship, and the same discipline.* None, beside those who have entered into his covenant, can act in any church as an ecclesiastical body; nor take any part in its ecclesiastical proceedings. This covenant, and this alone, binds them together as a church. None of the persons mentioned above, are at the time supposed parties to such a covenant; and therefore none of them are members of a particular church. The ministers cease to be members of particular churches by their ordination, which

makes them officers in the church at large. The dismissed members whom I have specified, have ceased to be members of particular churches by the dissolution of the covenant which made them such, mutually agreed to by themselves and their brethren with whom they were thus in covenant.

It will here perhaps be asked again, *Is not every particular church a branch of the church general?* I answer, it is; because all its members, lawfully introduced in the manner specified above, are members of the church general. In this respect, and in this only, is it such a branch. But this fact in no way affects its character or situation as a particular church: an ecclesiastical body, possessing within itself the power of regulating its own worship, communion, and discipline. In this power, in any given church, no person can lawfully share, except those who are become parties to the mutual covenant which has constituted it a church.

Baptism renders any person capable of membership in a particular church, if he is disposed and otherwise prepared to unite himself to it. But neither this nor his profession of religion will constitute him such a member. This can be done in no other way but by means of that mutual covenant between him and the church which has been mentioned above.

It will be probably be farther observed, *that in many cases a great multitude of churches have been united together, so as to constitute in their view one church, and to be thus styled in their customary language.* Such, for example, are the churches of England and Scotland, and the Presbyterian church in America. *What is the situation of baptized persons, particularly of baptized infants, in these churches?* The same, I answer, in my opinion, as in our own. Any number of churches may unite together in their worship, communion, and discipline; and constitute themselves a single church. Of this church, however numerous, or however small, every individual who belongs to it becomes a member, either by an explicit or an implicit engagement to unite with its several members in their peculiar worship, communion, and discipline.

To those whom I am immediately opposing, the following

observations from Dr. Gill, which have lately come to my knowledge, will undoubtedly have great weight. "Baptism," he observes, "is not a church-ordinance: I mean, it is not an ordinance administered *in* the church, but *out of it, and in order to admission into it*, and communion with it; it is preparatory to it, and a qualification for it; it does not make a person a member of a church, or admit him into a visible church. Persons must first be baptized, and then added to the church, as the three thousand converts were. A church has nothing to do with the baptism of any, but to be satisfied they are baptized before they are admitted into communion with it."* It will be easily seen, that these opinions of Dr. Gill coincide with those which I have advanced in every particular but one. He supposes *baptized persons not to be members of the church in any sense.* I consider them *as members of the church general, but not of a particular church.*

The way is now prepared for an answer to the objection which we are examining. Persons baptized in infancy, are baptized on the ground of that profession of religion which their parents have made when they themselves become members of particular churches. This I shall have occasion to shew hereafter. At present I shall take it for granted. Whenever they themselves make the same profession of religion, they become entitled to communion at the sacramental table in any church which acknowledges their baptism and their profession to be scriptural. This communion is that which is customarily called *occasional communion:* such as a member of one church enjoys with another of the same communion. Whenever they enter into a church-covenant; and engage to adopt the worship, fellowship, and discipline, agreed upon by a particular church; they then, and not till then, become members of a particular church. I have heretofore shewn, that a profession of religion was necessary to constitute us members of the church of Christ. It has been here shewn, and I hope satisfactorily, that what may be called *a church-covenant* is indispensable to constitute us members of particular churches.

* Gill's Body of Divinity, vol. 3. p. 311.

If these things be admitted, the situation of persons baptized in their infancy becomes sufficiently plain with regard to their communion at the sacramental table. Those particularly whom I am opposing cannot, so far as they admit the opinions of Dr. Gill, object any longer to the baptism of infants on this score.

With respect to *the discipline* of persons baptized in infancy, my own views are these. It is chiefly committed to their parents and guardians; and is supremely administered in religious education, involving instruction, habituation, and government; duties respecting the person baptized which are of no small importance, and are incumbent also on the church, and on its individual members. But the consideration of this subject I shall resume when I come to the examination of *Christian discipline*.

SERMON CLVIII.

THE EXTRAORDINARY MEANS OF GRACE.

DIRECT ARGUMENTS FOR INFANT BAPTISM.

Go ye therefore, teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.—MATT. XXVIII. 19.

IN the preceding discourse, I considered *the principal objections of the Antipœdobaptists to the doctrine under consideration*, so far as I recollected them. I shall now proceed to offer some *direct arguments to prove, that infants are proper subjects of baptism.*

1. *Infants were circumcised in the church under the Abrahamic dispensation: circumcision was the same ordinance with baptism: therefore infants are to be baptized.*

The covenant made with Abraham was that which is made with the church under the Christian dispensation. To Abraham God said, Genesis xvii. 7, *I will establish my covenant between me and thee, and thy seed after thee in their*

generations, for an everlasting covenant; to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. In Lev. xxvi. 3. 12 it is said, *If ye walk in my statutes, and keep my commandments, and do them, then will I walk among you, and be your God, and ye shall be my people.* In conformity to this language Moses declares to the Israelites, Deut. xxvi. 17, after they had entered into a solemn, public, national covenant with God, *Thou hast avouched the Lord this day to be thy God; and the Lord hath avouched thee this day to be his people.*

In conformity to this covenant, God styled himself the *God of Abraham, the God of Isaac; and the God of Jacob;* and afterward the *God of Israel;* JEHOVAH, *God of Israel;* and THE HOLY ONE *of Israel.* Moses and the prophets, addressing the Israelites, call him perpetually *your God;* and when addressing the nation as one, *thy God.* But nothing is more evident, than that God could not be the God of Israel, or of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in any sense in which he is not the God of all nations, and of all individuals, except by his own sovereign and gracious determination expressed in his covenant. Equally evident is it, that no inspired man would style him the God of this nation, or of these individuals, but by his appointment. It deserves to be remarked, that he is never styled the God of Ephraim, nor the God of Judah. The covenant was not made with either of these divisions of Israel, separately considered, but with the whole nation. Nor is he ever styled the God of Moses, Joshua, Samuel, Solomon, Hezekiah, or Josiah; the covenant having never been made in form with either of these persons. But he is styled *the God of David,* with whom he renewed this covenant in a peculiar form. See 1 Kings vii. and 1 Chron. xvii.

God is also called, as you well know, *the God of Zion,* or *of his church,* for the same reason; to wit, that his covenant is made with her.

Now this is the very covenant which is made with the church under the Christian dispensation. Of this the evidence is unanswerable. St. Paul, quoting in the eighth chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, from the thirty-first of Jeremiah, verse 31—34, says, *For if that first covenant had been faultless,* to wit, the covenant made at Sinai, of which Moses was the mediator, *then should no place have*

been found for the second: to wit, that of which the apostle here declares CHRIST to be the Mediator. *For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel. After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: and they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness; and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.* It will be observed, that the words of this covenant are the same with the words of that which was made with Abraham; as from time to time publicly and solemnly repeated by the nation of Israel; and the same in substance with those which God himself used in his original promulgation of the covenant to that patriarch: all that is involved in this covenant being expressed in this single, comprehensive declaration, I WILL BE YOUR GOD, AND YE SHALL BE MY PEOPLE.

As the prophet Jeremiah has informed us; as St. Paul, quoting his declarations and commenting upon them, has informed us; that this is the covenant made with the church under the Christian dispensation; we cannot, without doing violence to the plainest language of the Scriptures, hesitate concerning this truth. As God made this very covenant with Abraham; as Moses and all the inspired men who followed him in the nation of Israel, have declared these to be the very words of that covenant; it cannot, as I think, even with decency, be denied to be the same covenant.

But in this covenant, *God expressly promised to be a God to Abraham and to his seed.* The proper import of these words is explained by God himself, when promulging the covenant to Abraham, Gen. xvii. 10—14, in a manner which seems to admit of but one construction. *This is my covenant which ye shall keep between me and you, and thy seed*

after thee; Every man-child among you shall be circumcised. And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you. And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you; every man-child in your generations; he that is born in the house, or bought with money of any stranger which is not of thy seed. He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, must needs be circumcised; and my covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. And the uncircumcised man-child, whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people. He hath broken my covenant. The covenant is here extended to infants directly descended from the loins of Abraham; to servants born in the house; and to servants bought with money of any stranger. It is also declared to be a covenant extending to all the generations of succeeding descendants of Abraham. This, it is to be remembered, is the explanation which God himself has given us of the extent of this covenant.

The manner in which the covenant was in this respect understood by Moses he has taught us in Deut. xxix. 9—15. *Ye stand this day all of you before the Lord your God; your captains of your tribes, your elders, and your officers, with all the men of Israel, your little ones, your wives, and thy stranger that is in thy camp, from the hewer of thy wood unto the drawer of thy water: that thou shouldest enter into covenant with the Lord thy God, and into his oath which the Lord thy God maketh with thee this day: that he may establish thee to-day for a people unto himself, and that he may be unto thee a God; as he hath said unto thee, and as he hath sworn unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. Neither with you only do I make this covenant and this oath; but with him that standeth here with us this day before the Lord our God; and also with him that is not here with us this day.*

In this passage Moses informs us in the first place, that *all Israel, not only the men, but their little ones also, their wives, and the stranger who was in their camp, from the hewer of wood to the drawer of water, were included in the covenant made, or, in better terms, solemnly renewed, with God on that day.*

Secondly; That *this covenant also was made between God*

and the succeeding generations of this people. Neither with you only (that is, with Israel then present) *do I make this covenant; but with him that standeth here with us this day before the Lord our God;* AND ALSO WITH HIM THAT IS NOT HERE WITH US THIS DAY.

Thirdly; That *it was the same covenant formerly made by God with Abraham, and afterward renewed with Isaac and Jacob.* It was the same in substance,—*that thou shouldest enter into covenant with the Lord thy God,* THAT HE MAY ESTABLISH THEE THIS DAY FOR A PEOPLE UNTO HIMSELF, AND THAT HE MAY BE UNTO THEE A GOD. It was the same in fact,—*as he hath said unto thee,* AND AS HE HATH SWORN UNTO THY FATHERS, TO ABRAHAM, TO ISAAC, AND TO JACOB.

From these passages it is evident, as I apprehend, beyond all reasonable debate, that the covenant made with Abraham, was made first *with himself;* secondly, *with his household generally;* thirdly, *with his servants by name,* whether born in his house or bought with money; fourthly, *with his infant children,* afterward limited particularly *to the descendants of Isaac,* and afterward again, *to the descendants of Jacob;* fifthly, *to these descendants as a people;* sixthly, *to their little ones, or infants, in every generation;* seventhly, *to their servants universally;* and eighthly, *to the strangers who dwelt in their nation.*

To all these God covenanted, that *he would be their God, and that they should be his people.*

I say, this is evident beyond debate, because it is expressed in so many words, and those as unambiguous as are found in any language. He who attempts to reason away the plain import of such explicit declarations, may amuse and deceive himself, and those who listen to him; but he must be a very unhappy commentator on the word of God.

This covenant being then the only covenant of grace which God has ever made with mankind; the terms, and therefore the extent, of it must ever continue the same, unless revealed or otherwise altered by its Author. But this covenant was as really and as expressly made with infants as with adults. If then God has not declared, in some manner or other, that he will no longer comprise infants within this covenant, it still comprises them. But he has made

no such declaration in any manner whatever. Infants are therefore still comprised in this covenant.

As the fact, that infants were universally circumcised in the church during the continuance of the dispensation made to Abraham, will not be contested; I shall proceed to shew, that *circumcision was the same sacrament with baptism.* Concerning this subject I observe,

In the first place, *that circumcision was appointed to be a token of the covenant above explained between God and his church.*

A *token* is *a sign or proof of any thing of which it is constituted a token.* Here circumcision is made a token of the covenant of God upon the circumcised. *Ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskins,* said God to Abraham; *and it shall be a token of my covenant betwixt me and you.* "It is," says Poole, commenting on this passage, "a *sign, evidence,* and *assurance,* both of the blessing promised by that God who appointed this ordinance, and of man's obligation to the duties required."

In a different form of expression, but ultimately with the same reference, and substantially with the same meaning, it is called a *seal of the righteousness of faith. And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had, being yet uncircumcised.* A seal, as you well know, is an instrument used to make an impression upon wax, annexed to some writing containing the pleasure, determination, or engagement, of him whose seal it is. The intention of annexing a seal to such a writing is, solemnly to make known, that the writing is his writing, or the act his act; and that it contains and communicates his pleasure. Thus, bonds, deeds of gift, indentures, commissions, and other instruments, are sealed to authenticate the instrument itself, and to furnish an obligatory proof of the engagements of the sealer.

In the present case, it will be necessary, in order to understand the import of the seal in question, to examine the nature of the transaction to which it is annexed. This transaction is the covenant which has been so often mentioned in these discourses concerning baptism. A covenant *between men* consists universally of two promises, or engagements; one made by each of the parties. The fulfil-

ment of each of these promises is the condition alternately on which the performance of the other is engaged. Both promises are voluntarily made; and neither party originally was under any obligation to the promise actually made.

These observations however are only in a partial sense applicable to the covenant *made between God and man;* particularly to the covenant now under discussion. *This covenant is a law published by God, directing in an absolute manner the conduct of men with respect to the subjects of the covenant; and annexing penalties to their transgressions, and rewards to their obedience.* Thus, the man-child which was not circumcised on the eighth day, God says, *shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant.* Thus also in Lev. xxvi. he says, *I will walk among you, and be your God, and ye shall be my people; but if ye will not hearken unto me, and will not do all these commandments, but that ye break my covenant, I will also do this unto you; I will even appoint over you terror, consumption, and the burning ague, that shall consume the eyes, and cause sorrow of heart.* In Deut. xxvi. Moses says to Israel, *Thou hast avouched the Lord this day to be thy God, and to walk in his ways, and to keep his statutes and commandments, and his judgments, and to hearken unto his voice; and the Lord hath avouched thee this day to be his peculiar people, as he hath promised thee, and that thou shouldest keep all his commandments.* In the 89th Psalm, which contains a full and remarkable promulgation of the covenant of grace, or more properly perhaps of the covenant of redemption, speaking of Christ, God says, *If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments, then will I visit their transgression with a rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless my loving kindness I will not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail: my covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips.* In Jer. xxxi. quoted Heb. viii. God says, *This shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel, After those days, saith Lord, I will put my law in the inward parts, and write it in their hearts.* In Ezek. xxxvi. the same things are expressed in the following manner; *Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean; a new heart also will I give you; and I will put my Spirit within you; and I will cause*

you to walk in my statutes; and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them. The same things are also repeated in similar language in the thirty-seventh chapter. From these passages, it is unanswerably evident, that *this covenant*, as well as every other made by God with mankind, *is a law requiring absolutely their obedience; annexing to it rewards; and threatening disobedience, with the merited penalties.*

Still, it is not merely a law; it is also a covenant. In it God makes engagements to mankind; and those in the highest degree gracious. He engages on the terms proposed to be their God, and promises that they shall be his people. *These engagements involve all that is meant by grace; and admit of no additions.* They may be branched out endlessly into particular promises included under them; but they involve all gracious promises whatever. The covenant made with Abraham therefore is not only a covenant of grace; but includes all other gracious covenants which can be made with mankind: while it is also a law absolutely obligatory upon all to whom it is proposed.

In accordance with its character as a covenant, *men are made parties to it.* In accordance with its character as a law *they are required to become parties to it, and are punished for their refusal with the most distressing evils.*

From these observations it will be seen, that a seal, when annexed to this covenant by God, the Author of it, is a solemn sign and proof that this is his covenant, and contains the terms on which he has chosen to act towards those to whom he has published it, whom he has involved in it, and whom he has required to become parties to it. It is *his* seal annexed authoritatively by himself. It is a seal also *put upon mankind.* It is therefore to be placed upon all those whom he has included in the covenant; so far as he has directed them to be thus sealed. Every one of these is a proper subject of the seal. No question can be asked concerning the fitness of such persons to receive the seal; because that point is already decided by himself, in the direction which he has given to seal them.

It has been often supposed, that the seal of this covenant *was annexed to it by man;* to wit, *by every believer when, acknowledging the obligation under which he was placed, he took the covenant upon himself in making a public profession of religion.* Formerly this was my own opi-

nion, but, upon examining the several things which are said in the Scriptures concerning both the covenant and the seal, I have become convinced that it was a groundless opinion. My former apprehensions were, as I believe those of others frequently have been, not a little influenced by the nature of covenants between men. In these the parties, antecedently to the transaction, have no moral interest, and are under no obligation to make them. Their only obligation to perform that which they engage, arises from the engagement itself. If then both parties do not engage, the covenant can have no existence. By *both* parties also it must be sealed; and a seal set to it by *one of them* only stands for nothing.

To the covenant under discussion these considerations are wholly inapplicable. It is proposed to us as a law; and our obligations to conform to its terms arise solely from the command of God; and are binding upon us absolutely, whether we consent to them or not. We are in no sense at liberty to consent, or not consent; but our compliance is required by infinite authority. *The seal of this covenant therefore is not set by us; but by God upon us; and that, whether we voluntarily comply with its terms or not;* and is set upon such persons as he has thought proper to direct.

According to this exhibition of the subject, the circumcision which is declared to be *a seal of the righteousness of faith,* and *the token* or proof *of the covenant* of grace made with Abraham, was placed by the command of God upon him, and upon all the males in his household. Of these, some were infants, and some were servants. The consent, either of Abraham or of his family, was not asked. The compliance of some of them, to wit, such as were infants, was impossible. That of many others in his household was probably never yielded, either knowingly or voluntarily. Yet upon all these was the seal placed by the divine command, under a penalty, for omitting it, no less than excision. In the same manner was it placed upon the whole nation of Israel, and upon all the strangers who were within their gates.

To the existence of the opinion which I have rejected above, the fact, that *circumcision* is styled *a seal of the righteousness of faith,* has probably not a little contributed.

The righteousness of faith denotes two things. One is, *the faith itself, which is counted for righteousness.* The other is, *the righteousness,* in the proper sense, *which springs from faith.* In the former of these senses I consider the phrase as used in the passage so often alluded to. For it is said, that *he received this seal, that he might be the father of all them that believe, whether circumcised or uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed,* or counted, *unto them also:* in other words, that *their faith might be counted to them for righteousness,* even as his was. If this explanation be admitted, circumcision is here styled *the seal of the faith of Abraham,* that is, *it was a seal put upon Abraham as a believer by the appointment of God.* In the same manner was it put upon his infant offspring; upon his servants; upon all the people of Israel, being infants; upon all the strangers who dwelt with them; and upon *their* infant offspring. In every one of these cases, it was a token or proof that the covenant of God was upon them, as in the case of Abraham and his family. The covenant was the same; and the seal was the same. The import of the seal was therefore the same to them all. But it is perfectly plain, that Abraham's family were not all believers, in the evangelical sense; nor indeed in any sense, at the time when this seal was affixed to them; for some of them were infants. It is equally plain, that the great body of his descendants were also not believers when they were circumcised; they too being almost all infants. The conclusion is therefore irresistible, that *circumcision was not, and could not be intended to be, a seal set by God upon the actually existing evangelical faith of those who were circumcised;* because a part of those who were first circumcised by the immediate command of God, and almost all those who were circumcised afterward, were, at the time of their circumcision, unpossessed and incapable of this faith. Neither was it intended *to be a seal set by the person circumcised of his own faith:* for, in most instances, he did not possess this faith; and in no instance set this seal. He merely received it from the hand of God as a religious rite both ordained and affixed by Him.

Here it will reasonably be asked, *What then is the import of circumcision?* I answer, It is what it was at first declared to be. God said to Abraham, *Ye shall circumcise the flesh*

of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you. The covenant was a covenant of grace in these terms, *I will be your God, and ye shall be my people.* The conditions of it were, on the part of man, *that he should believe in God, especially in the Redeemer, with an evangelical faith;* and on the part of God, that *this faith should be counted to the believer for righteousness.* Of this covenant circumcision was originally the seal.

To mankind this covenant is, as I remarked above, *a law.* All persons to whom it is published are required thus to believe. The Israelites, and the strangers who dwelt with them, were expressly placed under it, and expressly required to receive circumcision as a *token, seal, or proof,* that the covenant of God was placed upon them by his authority; as a proof that *he was the God of Israel, and they his people;* as a proof also, that *they were required to believe in him, and that he would count their faith to them for righteousness.*

In conformity to this view of the subject, *they were required,* as was observed in a former discourse, *publicly and universally to swear into his name;* that is, to make a profession of religion, or to covenant that they would be his people, in the manner already specified; to wit, by faith in him. This they were universally required to do, whenever they arrived at such an age as to be capable of doing it with the heart and the understanding united. In this transaction, and not in circumcision, *man may,* in a remote and an humble sense, *be said to set his own seal to the covenant of grace.*

Secondly. *Circumcision was the initiatory seal of this covenant.*

By this I intend, that it was the public means of introducing the Israelites into covenant with God.

Thirdly. *Circumcision was a symbol of the internal cleansing of the heart, by the affusion of the spirit of God.* This is directly declared by St. Paul: *Circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter, whose praise is not of men, but of God.*

Fourthly. *There were two sacraments in the ancient church; circumcision and the passover. There are two sacraments in the Christian church; baptism and the Lord's*

supper. The passover is the same sacrament with the Lord's supper. It follows therefore, that baptism is the same sacrament with circumcision.

This, independently of the preceding considerations, is, I acknowledge, a presumptive argument only. Connected with them, its force will not be easily avoided. But baptism was appointed, equally with circumcision, to be a token of the covenant between God and his church; a seal of the righteousness of faith. It is also the initiatory seal of this covenant. Finally, it is a symbol of the cleansing of the heart by the affusion of the Spirit of God. It is therefore, under the present dispensation, the same thing with circumcision under the former.

Hence the conclusion appears to me unavoidable, that *as infants were circumcised under the former dispensation, they are to be baptized under the present.*

There are but two ways, which I can think of, in which this conclusion can be escaped, even with plausibility: *by supposing, either that the command to circumcise infants was, as to its spirit, repealed at the commencement of the Christian dispensation; or that the Christian church is not the same with the Abrahamic church.* The former of these suppositions will not be alleged by Antipædobaptists; for the latter they contend. On this subject I observe,

First. *That the covenant on which the church was founded under the Abrahamic dispensation, is the same with that on which it is founded under the Christian dispensation.* This I flatter myself has been answerably proved.

Secondly. *St. Paul asserts the church under both these dispensations to be one.*

If, he says, *the root be holy, so are the branches. And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive-tree, were graffed in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive-tree; boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee.* In this passage it is clear, that *the church is considered as an olive-tree, of which Abraha is the root, and the Jewish members the natural branc* that *some of these branches were broken off;* that *the G members were originally the branches of a wild olive, being cut as scions, were graffed in among the remaining*

natural branches; that is, the existing Jewish members; and that *the Gentiles thus became* συγκοινωνοι, *joint partakers with them of the root and fatness of the olive-tree.*

In no manner, of which I can conceive, could St. Paul have more decisively declared the unity of the church under these two dispensations.

Thirdly. That the church under these dispensations is but one, is evident also from Eph. ii. 14. *For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us.* In this passage, Christ is said to have broken down the wall of partition between the Jews and Gentiles, and having become the peace of both, to have made both one, that is, one church. But the Jews were in his church before. The Gentiles were therefore made one with the Jews, by being received into the same church.

Thus it is evident that the church, under the Abrahamic and Christian dispensations, is the same church. All the ordinances and privileges therefore, with which the church was originally constituted, remain the same, unless annulled or altered by that divine authority from which they were derived. But it was one original ordinance of this church, that the infant children of professing believers were constituted members of it, and were accordingly to receive the initiatory seal of the covenant. This ordinance has neither been annulled nor altered. The infant children of professing believers are, therefore, now constituted members of the visible church; and are now to receive the initiatory seal of the covenant.

I have dwelt thus particularly on this branch of the discussion, because I consider the point in debate as turning upon it; and because it has not always been considered in a manner which appeared to me accordant with either reason or Scripture.

2. *All the observations made on this subject in the New Testament, accord with the view of it which has here been given; and confirm the doctrine of infant baptism.*

Among such passages, the following deserve particular attention. First, Mark ix. 36. *And he took a child, and set him in the midst of them; and when he had taken him in his arms, he said unto them, Whosoever shall receive one of such*

children in my name, receiveth me; and whosoever shall receive me, receiveth not me, but him that sent me.

The meaning of the phrase, *to receive a child in the name of Christ*, is explained by himself in the forty-first verse of the context. *Whosoever shall give you a cup of water in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward.* To receive such a child in the name of Christ, is to receive him, *because he belongs to Christ.* Infants therefore, such at least as *he* spoke of, belong to Christ; and in this character are to be received by his followers. But they can be received, as belonging to Christ, in no other manner than that of receiving them into his church.

Secondly; Matt. xix. 13—15. *Then were there brought unto him little children, that he should put his hands on them and pray; and the disciples rebuked them. But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me, for of such is the kingdom of heaven. And he laid his hands on them, and departed thence.* Mark adds, that *he took them up in his arms, and blessed them.*

Of this passage I observe, first; *that the parents who brought these children to Christ were believing Jews who wished for his blessing on their offspring.* Secondly; *they were infants;* being called by Luke, βρεφη. Luke xviii. 15. Thirdly; *the disciples rebuked the parents.* Fourthly; *Christ reproved the disciples, and directed them to suffer the infants to be brought to him.* Fifthly; *he declared, that of such children the kingdom of God is composed.* Sixthly; *he took them in his arms, and blessed them.* The kingdom of God denotes, either the church on earth, or the church in heaven. Whether one or the other, or both, are here intended, is of little importance to the question in debate. It is however in the highest degree probable, that the church on earth is intended; as, very plainly, children can come to Christ in the present world, so as to constitute a part of his kingdom, in no other manner than by becoming members of the visible church. It is plain also, that they cannot be forbidden by his ministers to come to him in any other manner, beside being excluded from the church. Christ blessed these children after he had made this declaration. Those whom Christ has blessed, to whom he has

directed ministers to permit to come to him, ministers ought not to forbid to come to him in the only manner in which they can either forbid or permit this to be done.

The interpretation which makes our Saviour say, "Suffer little children to come unto me, because the kingdom of God is composed of Christians;" that is, of such as have a childlike spirit; sometimes alleged, is undeserving of a refutation.

In accordance with the account which I have given of this passage, as well as with the whole scheme of this discourse, *the apostles preached, so far as we are informed of their preaching.* They preached *to a man and his house;* and their language was, *Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, thou and thy house.* The angel who appeared to Cornelius said to him, *Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon whose surname is Peter, who shall tell thee words whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved.*

Thirdly. Acts ii. 38, 39. *Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.*

The promise here referred to is plainly that which was made to Abraham; *a promise to him and to his seed;* to wit, the very persons on whom God directed the seal of his covenant to be placed. These we well know were to a great extent infant children. As there is no other promise in the Scriptures made to the Israelites and their children; we know that this is the promise referred to by St. Peter: and this declaration assures us, that it is extended to the church under the Christian dispensation. As there is no limitation of the promise here, nor in any other part of the New Testament; we have in this fact ample proof, that it is extended to Christians without any limitation. It may, I think, be safely concluded, that if so great a change had been made in the conditions of the promise, St. Peter would at this very time have advertised these Jews of such a change. We may at least be certain, that he, or some other apostle, would have announced this change somewhere. But no such annunciation exists

in the New Testament. The change therefore has not been made: and children hold exactly the same relation to the church at the present time, which they held under the Abrahamic dispensation.

Fourthly. 1 Cor. vii. 14; *For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the believing wife, and the unbelieving wife by the husband, else were your children unclean, but now are they holy.*

The word *unclean*, in almost all instances in the Scriptures, denotes, *that which may not be offered to God, or may not come into his temple.* Of this character were the Heathen universally; and they were therefore customarily and proverbially denominated unclean by the Jews. The unbelievers here spoken of were Heathen; and were therefore unclean. In this sense, the children born of *two Heathen parents* are here pronounced to be unclean also; as being in the proper sense Heathen. *To be holy*, as here used, is the converse of being unclean; and denotes, *that which may be offered to God. To be sanctified*, as referring to the objects here mentioned, *is to be separated for religious purposes; consecrated to God;* as were the first-born, and vessels of the temple; or *to be in a proper condition to appear before God.* In this text it denotes, that the unbelieving parent is so purified by means of his relation to the believing parent, that their mutual offspring are not unclean, but may be offered unto God. There is no other sense in which a Jew could have written this text, without some qualification of these words. The only appointed way in which children may be offered to God is bapt. The children of believing parents are therefore to be offered to God in baptism.

3. *Infant baptism was uniformly practised by the early Christians.*

Justin Martyr, born near the close of the first century, observes, when speaking of those who were members of the church, that "*a part of these were sixty or seventy years old, who were made disciples to Christ from their infancy.*" But there never was any other mode of making disciples from infancy except baptism.

Irenæus, born about the year 97, a disciple of Polycarp, who was a disciple of John, says, "*Christ came to save all*

persons who by him are born again unto God; infants, and little ones, and children, and youths, and elder persons." By being born again, Irenæus intends *being baptized,* as he himself elsewhere clearly shews.

Clemens Alexandrinus, born about the middle of the second century, says, "*If any one be a fisherman; let him think of an apostle, and the children taken out of the water.*" Clement is here giving directions concerning images to be engraven on seal-rings. These engravings were sometimes indecent, and sometimes idolatrous. Clement exhorts Christians to adopt such as are becoming and useful; and particularly exhorts fishermen to choose *the image of an apostle baptizing infants.* This furnishes a decisive proof, that in Clement's view, the apostles baptized infants, and that this practice was, in his own time, the general practice of the Christian church.

Tertullian, born about the same time with Irenæus, says, "*The delay of baptism is more useful, according to every person's condition and disposition, and even their age; but especially with regard to little children.*" The reason which he urges for this delay is, that *their faith was not entire or complete.* As Tertullian is here directly opposing the common opinion; it is obvious, that little children were then commonly baptized. The reason why Tertullian proposed this delay was, that he attributed to baptism an importance not given to it by the Scriptures.

Origen, born about the year 184, and a man of more information than any one of his time, says, "*Infants are baptized for the remission of sins.*" And again; "*The church hath received the tradition from the apostles, that baptism ought to be administered to infants.*

Cyprian, who was contemporary with Origen, says, that, "*Sixty-six bishops being convened in a council at Carthage, having the question referred to them, 'Whether infants might be baptized before they were eight days old,' decided unanimously, that no infant is to be prohibited from the benefit of baptism, although but just born.*"

Gregory Nazianzen, born in the early part of the fourth century, exhorts parents to offer their children to God in baptism.

Saint Augustin, born in the middle of the fourth century,

says, "*The whole church practises infant baptism; it was not instituted by councils, but was always in use.*" He also says, that *he did not remember ever to have read of any person, whether catholic or heretic, who maintained that baptism ought to be denied to infants.* "*This* (he says) *the church has always maintained.*"

Pelagius, a contemporary with Augustin, declares, that "*he had never heard even any impious heretic, who asserted that infants are not to be baptized.*" Again he asks, "*Who can be so impious as to hinder the baptism of infants?*" Pelagius is here a witness of high authority. He was born in Britain; and travelled through France, Italy, Africa Proper, and Egypt, to Jerusalem. Had such a practice existed in his time, it seems impossible that he should not have heard of it. He was also an inquisitive and learned man; and must therefore have been well informed concerning preceding periods. At the same time, the doctrine of infant baptism was objected against his own opinions by St. Augustin in such a manner that Pelagius knew not how to answer the objection. Still these are his own assertions.

A person, who employed himself extensively in examining this subject, gives the following result of all his inquiries. "First; during the first four hundred years from the formation of the Christian church, Tertullian only urged the delay of baptism to infants, and that only in some cases; and Gregory only delayed it perhaps to his own children. But neither any society of men, nor any individual, denied the lawfulness of baptizing infants.

"Secondly; in the next seven hundred years, there was not a society, nor an individual, who even pleaded for this delay; much less any who denied the right or the duty of infant baptism.

"Thirdly; in the year eleven hundred and twenty, one sect of the Waldenses declared against the baptism of infants; because they supposed them incapable of salvation. But the main body of that people rejected the opinion as heretical; and the sect which held it soon came to nothing.

"Fourthly; the next appearance of this opinion was in the year 1522."

Had the baptism of infants been ever discontinued by the church; or had it been introduced in any age subsequent to that of the apostles; these things could not have been; nor could the history of them have been found.

SERMON CLIX.

EXTRAORDINARY MEANS OF GRACE.

NO INFANTS BUT THE CHILDREN OF BELIEVERS PROPER SUBJECTS OF BAPTISM. MODE OF ADMINISTRATION.

Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.—ACTS II. 38, 39.

THE persons here addressed by St. Peter were a collection of Jews. Of course they were persons on whom God had placed his covenant, and to whom he had affixed the seal of circumcision. They were persons who had regularly partaken of the passover through life. They were not excommunicated persons. They were therefore still in the covenant. On this ground St. Peter declares to them, that the promise was still to them and to their children.

Still they were gross sinners; and had imbrued their hands in the blood of the Redeemer. They had not indeed been employed in the external act of putting him to death: this was done by the Roman soldiery. But they had sought and procured his death with a disposition probably more malignant and abominable than that of his murderers. Thus they were gross sinners, and were therefore called upon to *repent*. They were also required to *be baptized, every one of them, in the name of the Lord Jesus, for the remission of sins;* because baptism was now become the initiatory seal of the covenant. As the promise was to them and to their children, according to the gracious

declaration of God to Abraham, it follows, that they being baptized, and thus introduced into the covenant under the Christian dispensation, and made members of the church under that dispensation, their children also were placed under the same covenant, and were to be baptized according to the appointment of God.

These persons, I say, *were to be baptized.* The question naturally arises, what is it to be baptized? It will be the design of this discourse to shew,

I. *That infant baptism is, in the Scriptures, confined to the children of professing Christians;*

II. *To shew what baptism is, considered as an external religious rite.*

I. *I shall attempt to shew, that infant baptism is in the Scriptures confined to the children of professing Christians.*

This doctrine I derive,

1. *From the constitution of the Abrahamic church.*

All the Israelites were circumcised. All of them, as was shewn in a former discourse, made a public profession of religion; or entered publicly into covenant with God. They all also partook regularly of the passover. Thus the children of every Jew were the children of a professor of religion; and as such received the initiatory seal of the covenant of grace.

As the covenant under the Christian dispensation is, unless in some respect or other altered by the authority which first promulged it, exactly the same as it was under the Abrahamic dispensation, and cannot be lawfully either widened or narrowed by man; it follows, that children are now to be considered in exactly the same light as under the former dispensation, unless the Scriptures have evidently changed the state of their relations and privileges. But in these respects no such alteration can be pleaded: for the Scriptures evidently contain none. The church is not now confined to a single nation; nor are the individuals of any one nation, as such, made members of the church. But the duty of professing the religion of the Scriptures, and the peculiar duties and privileges of those who have professed it, are now in substance exactly what they were under the dispensation made to Abraham.

It is evident therefore, that since no children, beside the children of those who publicly professed the religion of the Scriptures, could lawfully receive the initiatory seal of the covenant under the Abrahamic dispensation, no children but such as these can lawfully receive this seal under the Christian dispensation; unless the covenant, with respect to this subject, can be shewn to have been altered. But this it is presumed cannot be shewn.

2. *The parents who are represented in Matthew* xix. 13, 14, *as having brought their children to Christ that he might bless them, were professors of religion.*

As they were Jews, this will not be disputed. In addition to this they were evangelical believers. They brought their children to Christ, *that he might bless them;* and therefore believed that he was able to give them an efficacious blessing. Of consequence they believed that he was the Messiah. For as he declared himself to be the Messiah, if he was not he was an impostor; and therefore utterly unable to communicate any blessing. As this time of Christ's ministry it is hardly possible, that these parents should have been ignorant of this subject: since it was the great topic of inquiry and debate among their countrymen. Nor is it conceivable, that they should have adopted this remarkable conduct, if they had not acknowledged him as the Messiah.

It is to be observed, that Christ, when he opposes the conduct of his disciples, who would have hindered these children from being brought to him, says not, *Suffer little children,* but suffer *the* little children to come unto me, and forbid them not. The words in all the three evangelists who have recorded this story are, τα παιδια, *the little children;* and cannot be pleaded as a warrant for bringing to Christ in baptism any other children, than such as are in the like circumstances with those mentioned in this passage.

3. *The text directly declares the same doctrine.*

The promise, says St. Peter to the Jews, *is to you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.* Those who *were afar off* were Gentiles; as St. Paul has taught us, Eph. ii. 17. *Christ came,* says the apostle, *and preached peace to you*

who were afar off, and to them that were nigh; that is, to the Ephesians, and other Gentiles, and to the Jews. *The promise,* St. Peter informs us, is to *as many* of these Gentiles *as the Lord our God shall call.* That it is to them in the same manner and on the same terms as to the Jews is decisively concluded; because neither St. Peter, nor any other scriptural writer, specifies any difference. The scions of the wild olive, St. Paul informs us, were grafted on the good olive; where they grew and partook of the fatness of the root in exactly the same manner as if they had been the natural branches. The terms it is to be remembered are the same: and the promise conveys no more, as well as no less, to the Gentiles than to the Jews; unless the alteration is declared. Such children then among the Gentiles as are born of those who profess the religion of the Scriptures, are included in the covenant, and are to be baptized. But the warrant extends to no others.

4. *The same doctrine is declared still more explicitly in* 1 *Corinthians* vii. 14.

For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; else were your children unclean, but now are they holy.

In this passage St. Paul declares, that if both parents are unbelievers, *their children are unclean:* that is, may not be offered to God; or in other words, may not be baptized: there being no other mode of offering children to God under the Christian dispensation. Thus the doctrine under discussion is, I think, clearly evident from the Scriptures. Accordingly, it has been adopted as the doctrine of almost all Protestant churches; and exists in the plainest language, in almost every Protestant catechism and confession of faith.

This doctrine has however been opposed *in two ways,* and by considerable numbers of divines and other Christians; and among them by many men of learning and piety.

One class of those who have rejected this doctrine, *have considered children as entitled to baptism in their own right; and without any reference to the relation which they bear to their parents.* These I suppose build their scheme on the fact, *that the Jewish children were universally circumcised;*

on the direction given by Christ to ministers, to teach all nations, baptizing them, &c.; *on the declarations of Christ concerning little children;* and perhaps on some other foundation, of which I am ignorant.

After what has been said concerning this subject in these discourses, it seems to me wholly unnecessary to make any farther observations on the scheme in question. The views which I have formed of it, I have already expressed with sufficient minuteness. If what I have said is not satisfactory; I shall despair of giving satisfaction.

The other class *require parents to make profession of religion before they will permit their children to be baptized; but neither require nor expect them to partake of the Lord's supper.* In this manner parents are taught, that there is a distinction between the qualifications which in the view of the Scriptures are necessary to warrant us to offer up our children in baptism; and those which are necessary to make us lawfully communicants at the table of Christ. This distinction appears to me to be altogether unscriptural. In support of this observation I observe,

First. *That the Scriptures have no where exhibited two such distinct sets of qualifications.*

If such a distinction be found in the Scriptures, it can be shewn. Until it is shewn, this position must be admitted.

Secondly. *The tenor of the Christian covenant precludes every idea of such a distinction.*

In this covenant *we avouch Jehovah to be our God, and ourselves to be his children.* This is a full profession of piety. That a profession of piety ought to be sincere, and to be made with the heart, will not be questioned. But if the profession be sincere, it cannot be questioned, that the professor has every possible right, and is under every possible obligation, to partake of the Lord's supper. If he believes the profession sincere; he will certainly believe that he has this right, and is under this obligation. If he believes that it is not sincere; he will certainly believe, that he has made it hypocritically and wickedly: for he cannot doubt, that God *requires truth in the inward parts.* If, before he has made a profession, he doubts whether he shall make it with sincerity; he certainly cannot but know, that

he who doubteth is condemned, and that *whatsoever is not of faith is sin:* that is, as I understand St. Paul, we cannot do that which we do not find to be with a fair rational probability warranted in the Scriptures. That he who enters into covenant with God should possess *truth in the inward parts* cannot be doubted. For *unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do that thou shouldest declare my statutes, or that thou shouldest take my covenant into thy mouth?* That real religion, or the religion of the heart, ought to be professed in a covenant with God, where the words always contain a profession of real religion, cannot be doubted by a man of common sobriety. No more can it be doubted, that he who is about to make this profession, ought first to be fairly persuaded that he can and shall make it sincerely. If it cannot be made sincerely; it is I think unanswerably evident, that it ought not to be made at all. In what manner and on what grounds he who makes a profession which he either knows or believes to be false, can in consequence of that profession expect blessings for himself or his children, I confess myself unable to divine.

Tenderness of conscience is, I am aware, usually pleaded for the practice against which I contend: and is pleaded in the following manner. "The person who wishes to make a profession of religion, for the purpose of obtaining baptism for his children, feels that they ought not to be deprived of such a privilege through his negligence; and is satisfied to enter into covenant with God, and to dedicate his children to him; but cannot come to the sacramental table, because of the denunciations contained in the Scriptures against an unworthy participation of that ordinance. To this tenderness of conscience," it is added, "Christian charity is bound to exercise a corresponding tenderness; and to permit him who is the subject of it to make a profession with these views; and of course to suffer him to absent himself from the table of Christ until his scruples shall be removed." This plea, as it seems to me, proceeds wholly on a series of errors; and those I think of a very unhappy nature. The tenderness of conscience here alleged, appears to me to be wholly mistaken. Tenderness of conscience, in the true and proper sense, always supposes,

that the person who is the subject of it, is sincerely inclined to do his duty, wherever he knows what it is. Its only perplexities therefore arise from the uncertainty of its duty. The person who did not know that it was lawful, and was not satisfied that it was unlawful, *to eat things offered to idols*, would feel himself deterred from eating these things by tenderness of conscience. A person who, with a belief that he was a Christian, has made a profession of religion, may afterward doubt whether he was really a Christian, and whether his profession was sincere; and of course may entertain serious and distressing scruples concerning the lawfulness of his attendance upon the Lord's supper. To tenderness of conscience, thus existing and thus exercised, or exercised in the same manner on any other occasion, Christians are bound to give every charitable indulgence.

But the case in hand appears to me to be of a widely different nature. Here the original supposition, as declared by the candidate himself, is, that he is not in his own view a Christian. Of this he exhibits himself as being clearly satisfied: for he alleges it as a reason why he cannot come to the sacramental table. But he thinks, that without being a Christian, he may offer up his children in baptism.

This error is founded on the supposition, that there is one condition upon which men may lawfully dedicate their children to God in baptism; and another upon which they may lawfully come to the Lord's supper. This is a distinction wholly unknown to the Scriptures. The only condition on which both these things may be done is, that we first offer up ourselves to God in the covenant of grace. Until this is done, we can lawfully celebrate neither of these sacraments. When it is done we can, with exactly the same lawfulness, celebrate them both. But the person concerned actually enters into this covenant. In this transaction he is sincere; or he is not. In other words, he is a Christian, or he is not a Christian. If he is not; he cannot make this covenant with God in truth, and therefore cannot make it at all. If he is, as he engages to walk in all the commandments of God, he is not only entitled, but obliged by his own engagement, as well as by the divine command, to celebrate the Lord's supper.

Another error in this scheme is, the supposition of the candidate, *that he can dedicate his children to God while he cannot dedicate himself.* If his heart is right; that is, if he is religiously sincere in one of these cases; it will be so in the other; and the offering will in both cases be accepted. If he be not thus sincere in the one case, he will not be sincere in the other; and the offering will be accepted in neither. In vain will it be pretended, that a man loves his children better than himself; or that he can perform an act of religious duty on their behalf, which he cannot perform on his own.

Another error attending this scheme, is the supposition, *that baptism is in its own nature a privilege.* Nothing is a privilege in the religious sense but what God has made such; and he has made nothing such except in his own way, and on his own terms. Baptism is a privilege, when administered and received in the manner appointed by him; but in no other. When this ordinance is received in any other manner, it is plainly no obedience to any command of his; and therefore has no promise; and, let me add, no encouragement to hope for a blessing. Blessings descend when God is pleased to give them. But he cannot be expected to give them unless when he is obeyed.

Thirdly; *This scheme introduces disorder into the Christian church.*

Some of the persons who hold this scheme, consider those who make a profession, without an intention to partake of the Lord's supper, as being members of the church: yet, so far as I know, very few of them regard themselves as sustaining this character. Accordingly few of them offer to vote in ecclesiastical proceedings. Others consider them, as they usually consider themselves; to wit, as not being members of the church. If they *are not* members of the church; it may be asked, but cannot be answered, why do they act as church-members in offering their children in baptism? If they *are* members of the church; it may be asked, in the same unanswerable manner, Why do they not act as church-members throughout; particularly in celebrating the Lord's supper? The Scriptures have confined infant baptism to the children of those who are members, and all these they have required *to do all things, whatsoever*

Christ hath commanded. But there is not a more solemn command; there is not a command which addresses itself to the heart of a Christian in a more forcible and affecting manner, than, *This do in remembrance of me.* Yet the persons in question not only live in a constant disobedience to this command; but, when they assumed the covenant, plainly declared, that they formed no design of performing this duty. Upon this plan they were received both by the minister and the church to whom they joined themselves. At the same time, although these persons disobey this command through life, they are, as far as I know, never called in question concerning their disobedience by any church with which they have been united. In what manner this conduct can be supposed consistent with the duty of ministers to teach, and of churches to require, those who are of their communion, to observe all things, whatsoever Christ hath commanded, I am unable to explain.

Several other things of minor importance, which I have not time to consider at present, are alleged in behalf of this practice. Indeed, had I ever so much time, they are of too little weight to demand any very serious attention.

On the other hand, the evils resulting from it are, at least in my view, of serious importance. It introduces into the minds of those within, and those without, unhappy views concerning the importance of the covenant; concerning that profession of religion which we make when we enter into it; and concerning the nature and tendency, the obligation and efficacy, of both baptism and the Lord's supper. All these, as they are presented to us in the gospel, are, even in the view of the church itself, lowered beneath the evangelical standard; while, in the apprehension of others, they are apt to be regarded as mere forms, and cease to be considered as services of piety. The discipline of the church at the same time becomes unhinged. Negligence in one case begets negligence in another; and thus a general spirit of disregarding this duty takes possession of the church at large. In this state of things it is hardly possible that Christians should improve, or that sinners should feel any strong inducements to enrol themselves in their number.

II. *I shall now attempt to shew what baptism is, considered*

as an external religious rite; or in other words, in what manner baptism is to be administered.

Concerning this subject I observe,

1. *Those to whom this ordinance is to be administered, are to be baptized into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.*

In other words, they are to be admitted into the visible family of God in the world; to have his covenant publicly established on them, by receiving this ordinance, its initiatory seal; to be openly enrolled among his children; and *to take his name upon them as a godly seed.*

The reasons why I suppose persons should be baptized *into*, and not *in*, *the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost*, I have alleged in former discourses. It will be unnecessary to repeat them here.

2. *They are to be baptized by a minister of the gospel.*

The proof of this position lies in the fact, that the commission to baptize was given to no other. No others therefore are warranted to perform this office.

3. *Baptism is to be administered with water only.*

This only is mentioned in the Scriptures. Nothing else therefore can with propriety be used by us.

4. *This water may be administered indifferently, either by sprinkling, affusion, or immersion.*

On this subject the Christian world has, for a considerable length of time, been disturbed by the clashing opinions and laborious contests of men arranged on the two sides of the question concerning baptism. It is remarkable, that those who have adopted the doctrine of infant baptism, have very generally considered *sprinkling* or *affusion*, and that those who have opposed it have considered *immersion*, respectively as the proper modes of administration. Why this has happened I am unable to explain. The latter of these classes have founded their opinion professedly on the proper meaning of the word βαπτιζω, and its root βαπτω; and on certain texts in which they think they find proofs, that the proper mode of baptizing was immersion, or plunging.

Concerning the former of these subjects I observe,

1. *That the body of learned critics and lexicographers* declare, that the original meaning of both these words is to *tinge, stain, die,* or *colour;* and that when it means immer-

sion, it is only in a secondary and occasional sense; derived from the fact, that such things as are *died, stained,* or *coloured,* are often immersed for this end. This interpretation of the words, also, they support by such a series of quotations, as seem unanswerably to evince, that this was the original classical meaning of these words.

3. I have examined almost one hundred instances in which the word βαπτιζω and its derivatives are used in the New Testament, and four in the Septuagint: these, so far as I have observed, being all the instances contained in both. By this examination it is to my apprehension evident, that the following things are true:

That the primary meaning of these terms is cleansing; the effect, not the mode, of washing.

That the mode is usually referred to *incidentally,* wherever these words are mentioned; and that this is always the case, wherever the ordinance of baptism is mentioned, and a reference made at the same time to the mode of administration:

That these words, although often capable of denoting any mode of washing, whether by affusion, sprinkling, or immersion (since cleansing was familiarly accomplished by the Jews in all these ways); yet in many instances cannot, without obvious impropriety, be made to signify immersion; and in others cannot signify it at all.

St. Paul informs us, 1 Cor. x. 1, 2, *Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud, and in the sea.* Happily for us, we have so particular an account of this transaction, as to be able to determine absolutely what St. Paul intended by the baptism of the Israelites in this instance.

In Exodus xiii. 21, 22, it is said, *And the Lord went before them,* that is, *the children of Israel, by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them in the way, and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light, to go by day and night. He took not away the pillar of the cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people.* In the fourteenth chapter, 19th and 20th verses, it is said, *And the angel of God, which went before the camp of Israel, removed and*

went behind them; and the pillar of the cloud went from before their face, and stood behind them; and it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel; and it was a cloud and darkness to them, but it gave light by night to these, so that one came not near the other all the night. And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the Lord caused the sea to go back, by a strong east wind, all that night, and made the sea dry land; and the waters were divided; and *the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea, upon the dry ground;* and the waters *were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left.* In these passages we find among others the following facts declared.

First; That God, or the angel of God, went before the Israelites, from the commencement of their journey at Succoth, in a pillar of cloud by day, and in a pillar of fire by night, until they were overtaken by Pharaoh and his army on the margin of the Red Sea, beside Pihahiroth.

Secondly; That the angel of God, who hitherto had gone before the camp of Israel, removed and went behind them, together with the pillar of the cloud; and that this symbol of the divine presence was a source of peculiar darkness to the Egyptians, and of peculiar light to the children of Israel; so that the former came not near the latter all the night.

Thirdly; That the waters of the Red Sea were divided, so as to be a wall on the right hand and on the left.

Fourthly; That the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea upon dry ground.

In the whole of this story, it is evident there is no account whatever of that baptism of the Israelites mentioned by St. Paul in the passage quoted from 1 Corinthians. There is not even an allusion to this baptism, unless it is in the declaration, that *the pillar of the cloud went from before the Israelites, and stood behind them.* By the waters of the Red Sea they were not even sprinkled, much less immersed, but went, as Moses expressly informs us, between two walls of water, upon the dry ground. Neither is there here any account that *they were baptized in the cloud,* whatever this phraseology may mean.

But what Moses has omitted, Asaph has particularly recorded in the seventy-seventh psalm, in the following words.

The waters saw thee, O God, the waters saw thee; they were afraid; the depths also were troubled; the clouds poured out water; the skies sent out a sound. Thine arrows also went abroad; the voice of thy thunder was in the heaven: the lightnings lightened the world; the earth trembled and shook. Thy way was in the sea, and thy path in the great waters; and thy footsteps are not known: thou leddest thy people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron. In this account of the passage through the Red Sea, we have *the baptism spoken of by St. Paul expressly mentioned;* together with several other facts not recorded by the historian. *The clouds poured forth water* upon them, or descended upon them in rain, while they were journeying through the sea. The marginal and literal translation is, *The clouds were poured forth with waters.* There is reason to believe, from this declaration, that when the cloud passed from the van of the Israelites to the rear, or when, in the language of the Psalmist, *they were poured forth* from before the Israelites to stand behind them, the rain may have descended from the cloud during this passage. Whether this be admitted or not, it is clear, that this is the only account of the baptism mentioned by St. Paul, which is contained in the Old Testament. And it is equally clear, that this baptism was a cleansing accomplished by the sprinkling of rain, and certainly not by immersion. The fancy of some of my antagonists, that the cloud in some manner or other embosomed the Israelites by resting upon them, and thus enveloping them as water envelopes a person immersed in it, would appear well I think in poetry, but has an aspect scarcely serious enough to claim a place in a theological discussion.

Here then is one instance in which this word denotes cleansing by *sprinkling*, and not by immersion.

Another is found in Hebrews ix. 10, *Which stood only in meats, and drinks, and divers washings,* διαφοροις βαπτισμοις, *diverse baptisms.* The word διαφοροι, when united with a substantive in the same number, denotes regularly, that the *things signified by the substantive are different in their nature.* Thus in the present case, the phrase *diverse baptisms* denotes *baptisms which were different in their nature from each other.* Now as the element with which all these

washings were accomplished was water, *the difference lay* of course *only in the manner in which the washing was performed.* Here then is another instance in which the word signifies something altogether different from immersion.

Another example is found in Matthew iii. 11, where John the Baptist says concerning Christ, *He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire.* The bare rendering of this passage, *He shall immerge you in the Holy Ghost and in fire,* is, one would think, a sufficient exposition of the impropriety of translating βαπτιζω by the word *immerge,* or plunge. Substitute *cleanse* for *immerge,* and the impropriety vanishes.

But we are not left to conjecture concerning this subject. Both prophecy and history inform us of the manner in which this baptism was accomplished. The prophet Joel, chap. ii. 28, 29, says, *It shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions, and also upon the handmaidens in those days will I pour out my Spirit.* Such is the language of the prophecy which St. Peter declares to have been fulfilled on this occasion.

The history is given us in the following words. *And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place; and suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing, mighty wind; and it filled all the house where they were sitting; and there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire; and it sat upon each of them, and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost.* Here we are directly told, that the baptism with the Holy Ghost and with fire was accomplished by *the affusion of both on the disciples from heaven.* To avoid the force of these direct declarations of the prophet and the historian, some of those with whom I am contending have, in the indulgence of an excursive imagination, gravely told us, that St. Luke declares the Holy Ghost to have *filled* the house. Hence they conclude, that the disciples were enveloped, and in a proper sense immersed, in the Holy Ghost. This is one among many specimens of the length to which even wise and good men are carried by favouritism for a darling point. Beside the metaphysical absurdity, and, as I think,

indecency of attributing place and extension in this manner to the divine Spirit, these gentlemen do direct violence to the words of the evangelist. St. Luke informs us, that *the sound filled the house.* The pronoun *it,* which precedes the verb *filled,* has for its antecedent *sound;* the only substantive in the verse to which it can possibly refer. The words of the original are still more explicit; and are thus literally rendered: *And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like that of a rushing mighty wind, and filled the whole house where they were sitting.* Were there any room for a possible doubt, that doubt is removed by the exposition of an inspired commentator. *Therefore,* says the apostle Peter, verse 33, *being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he,* that is *Christ, hath shed forth this which ye now see and hear.* The word translated *hath shed forth,* is εξεχεε, *hath poured out;* the same verb which St. Peter uses to denote the same thing in translating the passage from Joel. Here then is another instance in which the word βαπτιζω does not mean, *to immerse.*

I shall be excused, on account of the length of even the most concise comments of this nature, from proceeding any farther. Suffice it to say, that there are many other instances in which it is in my own view incredible, that this verb and its derivatives should mean *immersion;* and that on the contrary, *cleansing* is directly indicated by them, in all cases, as their principal meaning.

3. *It is incredible that the multitudes whom John baptized in the wilderness were immersed.*

Of these a very great multitude were women. These multitudes certainly came to hear John, without having prepared any proper dress in which to be baptized; for they could not even know that he would baptize them. It will not be mistrusted, that this promiscuous assembly were immersed naked. To have immersed them with their clothes on, would have exposed them to certain disease and death.

4. *It is impossible that those, whom Peter and his companions baptized on the day of Pentecost, should have been immersed.*

All the difficulties which attended the baptism of John's followers, attended that of these people also; and probably

in a still higher degree, because they did not assemble to be baptized, nor even to hear the preaching of the apostles. They therefore certainly assembled in their own usual dress. At the same time it seems almost a thing of course, that the apostles, who had just received a spiritual baptism by the affusion of the Holy Ghost, and announced it to their hearers, should follow the mode in which this baptism was administered to them, in administering the baptism which was symbolical of it, to their hearers.

But independently of these considerations, *the thing itself could not be done by the apostles, in the circumstances and within the time specified, in the mode of immersion.* St. Luke informs us, that *they who received the word of Peter were then baptized; and that the same day there were added to them about three thousand souls.* The only way in which these persons could be known to be added to the church, or could in fact be added to the church, was by their baptism. They were therefore baptized that day. But the apostles could not, in any supposable circumstances furnished by the city of Jerusalem, nor indeed in any circumstances whatever, baptize by immersion three thousand persons within the utmost part of that day which the story will allow us to consider as left for this purpose, after the other transactions mentioned in it were ended. The least consideration of the time necessary for each administration will clearly shew this impossibility. I conclude therefore, without hesitation, that these persons were not immersed.

5. *The fact, that the affusion of the Holy Ghost is called baptism, is a direct proof that the affusion of water is, in the view of the Scriptures, baptism also.*

The only question with which we are here concerned *respects the mode merely.* If then the communication of the Holy Ghost, whether for the purpose of enduing with supernatural gifts, or of sanctifying the soul, regularly expressed in the Scriptures by the verbs εκχεω, εκχυω, and εκχυνω, *to pour out,* be in the same Scriptures styled baptism; then the affusion of water in the ordinance symbolical of this spiritual baptism is, in the view of the Scriptures, baptism also.

6. *Christ has expressly taught us, that immersion is unessential to the administration of this ordinance.*

In John xiii. when Christ offered to wash the feet of Peter, *he* at first opposed it; but afterward consenting, requested that not only his feet, but his hands and his head, might be washed also. Our Saviour replied, *He that is washed need not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit.* The word here rendered, *he that is washed* is, ὁ λελουμενος, generally denoting *the washing of the whole body, or bathing;* and by respectable critics is supposed to have this meaning here. My reasons for differing from them are the following.

First; *The words of Christ are a reply to those of Peter, and intended to oppose the proposal made by him, that his master should wash his hands and his head as well as his feet.*

But the declaration, that a person bathed has no occasion to wash any part of his body except his feet, contains no opposition to Peter's proposal; since Peter was not bathed, nor indeed any relation to it, so far as appears to me, except what is very distant and fanciful.

Secondly; *Peter, upon this declaration of Christ, yields the point, and consents to have his feet only washed on the ground of this declaration.*

Had he understood his Master to intend by λελουμενος, *a person who had been bathed,* he would naturally have replied, that this was not his own situation, at least he could not have failed to *think* in this manner.

Thirdly; *The opinion of those who consider Christ as speaking here of a person bathed,* is, if I mistake not, *that he intends by a figurative use of this term, a person regenerated or sanctified.* But in this sense I cannot see that the declaration is true. Understood in this manner, Christ declares that a person who is regenerated is, with a small additional purification, perfect. The Scriptures, on the contrary, exhibit mankind as very imperfect in their best estate. St. Paul, when he wrote the Epistle to the Romans, and was about fifty-six years of age, and of course far advanced in the Christian character, says, *Oh, wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?* It can hardly be believed, I think, that in the view of Paul, the additional purification indicated by washing the feet, would have made *him* a perfect man.

If Christ is supposed here to intend a literal bathing, the meaning is obvious enough, and undoubtedly contains a truth; but the application of it to the case in hand seems difficult, if not impossible, to be conceived; the situation of a person who had been bathed not being that of Peter.

The meaning of the passage in my view is this. The washing of the disciples' feet was a symbolical washing. As Christ performed it, it exhibited on the one hand his pre-eminent condescension, and on the other indicated the fact that he was the author of their internal purification. This appears to me decisively proved by the declaration of Christ in answer to Peter, who at first not understanding the design of the washing, and thinking it very improper that his Master should perform it for him, said, *Thou shalt never wash my feet.* Christ then answered him, *If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me:* that is, "Unless thou receivest the sanctification from me of which this washing is a symbol, thou art not my disciple." Peter appears to me plainly to have understood it in the same manner; for being now acquainted with the real design of Christ, he replied, *Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head:* Christ rejoined, *He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit.* A symbolical washing is perfect, although applied only to the feet; as perfect as if it were also applied to the hands and the head. If this construction be admitted, it must also be admitted, that the declaration is general, and extends to every other symbolical washing, and therefore to baptism, unless excluded by some plain exception.

7. *The same doctrine is taught by God in the thirty-sixth chapter of the prophet Ezekiel.*

Here speaking of the Israelites he says, *Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean; and I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes.* Whether this is a direct prediction of the ordinance of baptism, as well as of the regeneration symbolically denoted by it, or not, is to the present purpose a matter of indifference. It cannot be denied, that it is symbolical language, in which God thought it proper to denote regeneration, by the affusion of his Spirit upon the soul. But if the language describing the act of sprinkling was proper sym-

bolical language to denote the act of regenerating, then the act itself of sprinkling is a proper symbolical act, unless God has made it improper by some plain declaration. The propriety of *the act* as a symbol, is evidently the only source of propriety in using *the language descriptive of the act, as a symbolical exhibition of that which it denotes:* to wit, *regeneration.*

To these observations may be added, *the unsuitableness of immersion as an ordinance of public worship to the circumstances of many nations in the world.*

In a nation whose manners are like ours, there is, to say the least, a degree of impropriety in this practice which is very unhappy. This it will be easily seen is a subject on which I cannot here expatiate. It will be sufficient to say, that whatever impressions may be made by this practice in countries where bathing is a standing custom, here they are of a very unfortunate nature, and such as are directly opposed to every religious feeling. I speak from facts, and not from opinions; and from facts repeated through a century, and therefore operating not by their novelty, but by their nature.

At the same time the health and the lives of those who are baptized, are often injured and destroyed. Here also I speak from facts. Both these considerations form, I acknowledge, only a presumptive argument in the present case; for God has an unquestionable right to require us to undergo this exposure or any other, according to his good pleasure. But the presumption is a very strong one; and to be admitted in its full force, unless the practice contended for is expressed with indubitable clearness.

On the texts alleged by those with whom I am contending, as proofs of baptism by immersion, I shall make but a few observations; because the discourse has already been long, and particularly because they appear to me to furnish very little support to the side of the question in behalf of which they are alleged. It is said of our Saviour, that after he was baptized *he went up straightway from the water,* ανεβη απο του υδατος, *he ascended from the water;* the word αναβαινω, signifying *to go,* or *come up; to ascend;* in whatever manner. This passage appears to be descriptive solely of Christ's ascending the banks of Jordan, after he had re-

ceived baptism. That this is not the meaning of the phrase cannot be shewn; nor rendered probable. The preposition απο, is erroneously rendered *out of* in our translation. Its proper meaning, as every Greek scholar knows, is *from*, and can be *out of* only by accident: as in Matthew vii. 4. *Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye.* Even here it would be much better rendered, *Let me take the mote from thine eye.* If Matthew intended to express Christ's rising out of the water, he has certainly used phraseology of a very peculiar nature.

Another passage, often triumphantly alleged for the same purpose, is Acts viii. 38, 39. *And they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him, and when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip.* To the translation here, no reasonable objection can be made. I will therefore not avail myself of what might however be justly alleged, to wit, that εις may with equal propriety signify *to*, and εκ *from*. Still I object to the construction of my antagonists, for these reasons.

First; That we as naturally say, that they went into the water of those who went in to the depth of the knees, or even of the ancles, as of those who have plunged themselves.

Secondly; The declarations here made, are made concerning the eunuch and Philip alike. Of both it is said, that *they went down into the water*, if we render the word εις, *into*. Of both also it is said, *that when they were come up out of the water;* if we render the word εκ, *out of*. Now let us see what will be the true import of the passage, according to this mode of construing the words in question. *And they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch;* that is, *they were both plunged. And he baptized him,* that is, *Philip plunged the eunuch.* And when they were come up out of the water, that is, when they had both been plunged the second time, and risen up from their immersion, *the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip.* In other words, both were plunged twice, and the eunuch the third time.

It is, I presume, unnecessary to comment on this version of the text under consideration. The only remark which I

shall make upon it is, that the adoption of such a sense for the two words, αναβαινω and καταβαινω, by some learned critics in the face of this construction of this text, is not a little surprising.

Thirdly; I conclude, as I think with certainty, that these words have no reference to the immersion of either; but are barely descriptive of the fact, that they went down *to*, or *into*, the water, in which perhaps they waded a little distance.

Another text of the same nature is Romans vi. 4; *Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death.* The word *buried* is here supposed to denote *immersion.* In the next verse it is said, *For if we are planted together in the likeness of his death.* My antagonists are bound to shew, that this figurative expression, which refers to the same thing, does not as strictly signify the mode in which baptism is received, as the word *buried;* and if it does, to point out the particular mode of administering baptism denoted by the word *planted.*

These are among the texts most frequently alleged by those with whom I am contending. I do not suppose that they are regarded as being of any great importance to the controversy. Their principal strength lies, as I conceive, *in their own view,* in what they suppose to be the original meaning of the words βαπτιζω and βαπτω, and these texts are pressed into the service as auxiliaries. If then their principal support fails, as if I mistake not I have shewn that it does, these texts will be alleged without success. The general conclusion therefore appears to me to stand on solid ground; to wit, that baptism is in the Scriptures instituted as a symbol of the affusion of the Spirit of God upon the soul in regeneration, and the cleansing of its sins by the blood of Christ; and that the mode in which it is administered is not in the Scriptures exhibited as a subject of serious importance, and is no where declared to be immersion.

SERMON CLX.

EXTRAORDINARY MEANS OF GRACE.

THE LORD'S SUPPER. ITS NATURE AND DESIGN. THE QUALIFICATIONS OF COMMUNICANTS.

And as they did eat, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and brake it; and gave to them, and said, Take, eat, this is my body. And he took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and they all drank of it. And he said unto them, This is my blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many. And when they had sung a hymn, they went out into the Mount of Olives.—MARK XIV. 22—25.

HAVING considered at length the *nature, intention,* and *subjects, of baptism, and the manner in which it is to be administered;* I shall now proceed to examine the other sacramental ordinance of the Christian church; *the Lord's supper.* In the progress of this examination, I propose to consider,

I. *The nature,* and
II. *The design, of this ordinance;*
III. *The qualifications necessary for attendance upon it;*
IV. *The disposition with which it is to be attended;* and,
V. *The motives to this attendance.*

I. *The nature of this ordinance may be generally described in the following manner.*

It is a symbolical religious service, instituted by Christ as a commemoration of his death. The symbols are bread broken, and wine poured out, denoting the breaking of his body and the effusion of his blood upon the cross. The bread is to be broken and the wine poured out by a minister of the gospel only; and by him both are to be distri-

buted to every member of the church who is present. All these are to receive them both: the Romish doctrine, that the laity are to receive this ordinance in one kind, and only the clergy in both kinds, being merely a human invention uncountenanced by the Scriptures. Before the administration of each of these elements, a prayer is to be made; in which the blessing of God is to be implored upon the celebration of the ordinance, and thanks are to be given to him, for his mercy and goodness generally, and particularly as displayed in the interesting event which is commemorated. The whole service is to be concluded with singing a psalm or hymn by the communicants.

This solemnity has been commonly styled *a sacrament*, from the resemblance between the engagement made to Christ by the communicants, and the oath of the Roman soldiery by which they pledged their fidelity to their general. This name however it bears in common with the ordinance of baptism.

It is also often called the *eucharist*; ευχαριστια, probably from the use of the word ευχαριστησας, *having given thanks*, found in all the accounts of this institution contained in the New Testament.

But the most usual name which it bears among Christians is, *the Lord's supper*, the origin of which needs no explanation.

The *time* at which this ordinance is to be celebrated, is of no material importance. It was instituted in the evening: it is however celebrated most commonly at noon. This fact seems to have been determined by mere convenience: and, as the Scriptures have laid no stress on the time of celebration, it has been determined I think with entire propriety. I cannot but observe here, that as the time and manner of celebration, when this ordinance was instituted, are distinctly exhibited: *those who contend so strenuously for immersion, as essential to the ordinance of baptism*, from the meaning of the word βαπτιζω, and the few hints which they think they find in the language of the Scriptures, at the best doubtful, *are bound, on their own principles, to spread a table in the evening, to sit in a reclining posture, and thus to celebrate this sacrament on the evening*

preceding every Lord's day. All this ought also to be done in *a large upper room* contained in a private dwelling. It is presumed no reason can be given, why so much solicitude should be shewn concerning the mode of administering baptism, and so little concerning the mode of administering the Lord's supper.

This ordinance is customarily celebrated by a great part of the churches in New England, on the first sabbath of every month. This seems to be as frequent as convenience will ordinarily allow. In the Presbyterian churches, it is celebrated either twice or four times in a year: an infrequence for which I am unable satisfactorily to account.

II. *The design of the Lord's supper may be summarily exhibited in the following manner:*

It is intended,

1. *To represent the great sacrifice of Christ on the cross.*

The truth here declared is sufficiently evident from the breaking of the bread, and pouring out of the wine; and completely from the words of Christ; *This is my body which is broken for you.* 1 Cor. xi. 24. *And this is my blood of the New Testament which is shed for many.* Mark. xiv. 24. Accordingly all Christians, so far as I know, have admitted the position as true.

In a former discourse concerning baptism, I have remarked, what indeed is felt and acknowledged by all men, that sensible impressions are much more powerful than those which are made on the understanding. This truth is probably neither so fully nor so deeply realized in any religious ordinance as in the Lord's supper. The breaking of the bread and the pouring out of the wine exhibit the sacrifice of Christ with a force, a liveliness of representation, confessed by all Christians at all times; and indeed by most others also; and unrivalled in its efficacy even by the passover itself. All the parts of this service are perfectly simple, and are contemplated by the mind without the least distraction or labour. The symbols are exact and most lively portraits of the affecting original; and present to us the crucifixion and the sufferings of the great subject of it, as again undergone before our eyes. We are not barely taught;

we see and hear, and of consequence feel, that *Christ our passover was slain for us,* and *died on the cross, that we might live.*

As this event, more interesting to mankind than any other which has ever existed, is thus clearly presented to us in this ordinance; so *those doctrines of the Christian system, which are most intimately connected with it, are here exhibited with a corresponding clearness.* Particularly, *the atonement* which this divine Person thus accomplished for mankind is here seen in the strongest light. With similar certainty is *that depraved character of man* which is here expiated unfolded to our view: *the impossibility of our justification by works of law; our free justification by the grace of God, through faith in the blood of Christ:* and generally, *the whole scheme of reconciling apostate man to his offended Creator.*

The guilt of sin particularly is exhibited to us in the strongest colours. This ordinance, by presenting to us in the most lively and affecting manner the sufferings of the Redeemer, powerfully enforces on us a conviction that those sufferings were necessary. Every Christian will readily subscribe to the declarations of St. Paul; *If there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law; and if righteousness come or be by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.* Had such a law been possible, and proper in the sight of God; it would, I think, certainly have been published to mankind. Had it been *possible, this cup would have passed from Christ.* Could the great purpose of pardoning sin and justifying sinners have been accomplished without the death of the Son of God; this event could never have found a place in the counsels of infinite wisdom and goodness. To accomplish this end then, the infinite mind saw no proper way which was less expensive. How fearfully guilty are those, to expiate whose sins this glorious Person died on the cross; to save whom this death was indispensable!

In this solemn ordinance, these truths are in a sense visible. The guilt of sin is here *written with a pen of iron, and with the point of a diamond.* Christ, in a sense, ascends the cross; is nailed to the accursed tree; is pierced with the spear; and pours out his blood to wash away the

sins of men. Thus, in colours of life and death, we here behold the wonderful scene in which was *laid on him the iniquity of us all.*

2. *The Lord's supper is designed to be a standing proof of the mission of Christ, and of the truth of the gospel, which is an account of that mission.*

In the first of the discourses concerning baptism I made a similar observation concerning that ordinance; and remarked, that I should defer the particular consideration of it to a future time. The present is the occasion to which I then referred. I now therefore observe generally, that baptism and the Lord's supper are, together with the Christian sabbath, standing proofs in the church of the mission of Christ, and the truth of his gospel; and that the observations which, in this view, are applicable to one of these subjects, are substantially applicable to the others also. St. Paul, after finishing his account of the institution of this ordinance, makes this remark; *For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.* That which the Spirit of inspiration declares to be invariably done in the celebration of an ordinance, was undoubtedly included in the institution of that ordinance. But the Spirit of inspiration here declares, that whenever Christians celebrate the Lord's supper, they shew forth or exhibit the reality of his death until the time of his second coming. To do this then was one design with which this ordinance was instituted.

The manner in which the Lord's supper becomes and operates as a proof of these things, may be seen in the following particulars.

First. *It was instituted either at the time specified or afterward.* If it was instituted at the time specified, it was certainly instituted by Christ himself. His enemies certainly would not, and did not, institute a solemn religious service, as a memorial of a person whom they hated and despised. His friends would not dare to institute a religious service, unless it had been enjoined or directly countenanced by himself; or, in other words, unless he himself had directed it. It was therefore instituted by himself.

But if it was instituted by himself, it is unnecessary to observe, *it was instituted before his death, and with a full*

expectation, on his part, that he should die in the manner predicted in the institution itself; viz. *upon the cross.* It was also instituted by a person, and in commemoration of the death of a person, assuming the character, and being believed by his followers rightfully to assume the character, attributed to Christ: a person who came into the world with a mission from God to publish the way of salvation, and to give his life a ransom for many. It is impossible that men of that age and country should not know, whether the person who is declared to have instituted this ordinance lived; and lived among those who were witnesses of the institution. They could not but know, whether the character which is declared of him was his true character in the view of his followers; and whether he so lived, preached, and wrought miracles, suffered and died. His life, miracles, preaching, and whole apparent character, were all public; and were therefore certainly known to his countrymen; particularly to the Pharisees, and other leaders of the Jews; who, with so much zeal, hatred, and envy, laboured incessantly, with a severe and prying scrutiny, to detect his haltings, if he had any.

All these things also must have been known, particularly to the apostles. They lived with him daily; and saw every thing which he did, heard every thing which he said, and knew, so far as the nature of the case would allow, every thing which he was.

Judas had access to him at all times, and knew the worst as well as the best of his character. He hated Christ, betrayed him to the Jewish leaders, and corresponded with them intimately. If Christ was an impostor, he knew it; and, instead of hanging himself under remorse of conscience for his treachery, would certainly have declared his Master's fraud to the world, and congratulated himself for having delivered mankind from such a cheat. Particularly he would have disclosed this to the Pharisees; and they to mankind.

But the apostles themselves could never have commemorated a person whom they believed to be an impostor in an act of religious worship. Whether he was an impostor or not, they certainly knew. In their long familiarity with him, they could not fail of understanding the nature of all

his conduct. It was impossible that they should have thus commemorated a person whom they believed to be a cheat; especially a person who left them no worldly benefits; who was hated and despised by almost all their countrymen; and to follow whom was productive of unceasing obloquy, contempt, and persecution. No human being ever commemorated one whom he believed to be an impostor in this manner.

The institution itself is a prophecy of the death of Christ, and of his death on the cross. He had also repeatedly prophesied the same event before, both to his apostles and to others. It was publicly known; as the Pharisees prove in their conversation with Pilate, Matt. xxvii. 62, &c. With equal publicity had he declared his resurrection on the third day: as is manifest in the same passage. If he did not thus die; if he did not thus rise; he was beyond all controversy proved to be an impostor; and would have been remembered only with execration. No person, believed to be an impostor, has ever been remembered otherwise.

If this institution was introduced after the period specified; this fact is, in the first place, *contrary to the united declarations of ecclesiastical history.*

Secondly; *It is inexplicable; and,* I think, *plainly impossible.*

If the Lord's supper was not introduced at the time specified, those to whom it was first proposed could not but certainly know, that they had never heard of it before. The Christians to whom it was first proposed must have been those at Jerusalem; or at some other place; and the time of this proposal must have been either before or after the publication of the gospel.

If the Christians to whom it was at first proposed were those at Jerusalem, they perfectly well knew the life and death of Christ; and the evidences of his mission, miracles, and character. If he had not lived, taught, wrought miracles, died, and risen again, in the manner declared; it is impossible, that these persons should not have known the falsehood of these declarations. If they had not believed him to be the MESSIAH; they must have believed him to be an impostor; and would never have commemorated him in a religious service. It is to be remembered, that these

persons were all Jews; whose bigotry to their own religion and hatred to Christianity are proverbial and wonderful; and who would no more willingly, to say the least, have commemorated as the Saviour of mankind, *after* than *before* his crucifixion; unless they had become completely convinced of his resurrection, and consequently of his Messiahship. The very proposal of such a commemoration they would have received only with indignation and horror. This certainly would have been the state of facts, if the institution had been attempted antecedently to the publication of St. Matthew's Gospel, written in Hebrew for the use of these very people.

If this sacrament was introduced after this period, and, what is necessary to give even plausibility to the supposition, *so long after as to infer some obscurity and oblivion of the events commemorated; the event would have been attended with two insuperable difficulties.* The first is, *St. Matthew declares, that Christ himself instituted this sacrament.* Those to whom the proposal was now made for the first time, must of course have seen, that the apostles themselves had not obeyed the injunction of their Master, and therefore falsely professed to believe him to be the MESSIAH. The account given by Matthew must have contradicted any accounts which *they* could give, and clearly convicted them of gross and absolute disobedience to Christ, in a capital point of Christian practice. With Matthew also agree the other evangelists. There must therefore have been an entire opposition between Matthew and the other evangelists on the one side, and those who attempted to form this new institution on the other. Such a schism must have been too dangerous to have been ventured upon for the sake of any institution in so early a period of the church, and would not improbably have terminated its existence.

The second difficulty is, *St. Luke declares, that the disciples began the celebration of this institution on the day of Pentecost;* ten days only after Christ's ascension; *or just about that time; and asserts, that they continued this practice daily and weekly, without ceasing.* See Acts ii. 42. 46; and Acts xx. 7. The last of these passages asserts this to have been the practice of the apostles, on the first day of the week, in the year 56; twenty-three years after

the crucifixion. The book of the Acts appears to have been finished in the year 64. The last declaration therefore assures us, that the celebration of the Lord's supper continued to be a weekly practice of Christians until that time. Thus we learn from St. Luke, that Christians, as a body, regularly celebrated the Lord's supper, under the authority of the apostles, for twenty-seven years after the crucifixion.

St. Paul was converted about the year 37. He wrote the First Epistle to the Corinthians in the year 56. In this epistle, in the *eleventh chapter, twentieth verse,* &c. he teaches us, in the most decisive manner, that the Lord's supper was a standing ordinance in the church at Corinth, and, by necessary analogy, in every other part of the world. The same thing he indicates also in chapter x. 21. As St. Paul was converted four years only after the crucifixion, and was at Jerusalem with the other apostles three years afterward; it is impossible that he should not have known, whether this ordinance was universally celebrated or not; and whether it had or had not been universally celebrated in the earliest moments of the apostolic church. St. Paul is thus a decisive witness of the truth of St. Luke's account. Of both these testimonies it is farther to be observed, that they are given incidentally, without any design of establishing this fact, and for purposes of a totally different nature. They are therefore absolutely unexceptionable, and undesignedly confirmatory of each other.

It may here with propriety be added, that Justin Martyr, who flourished about the year 130, and was born about the close of the first century, says, "All Christians, both of the city and the country, assemble on Sunday, because our Lord rose on that day; and then we hear read the writings of the prophets and the apostles; then the person presiding makes a speech to the congregation, exhorting them to follow and perform the things which they hear. After this we will unite in prayer, and then celebrate the sacrament; and such as are willing and able give alms." Here the celebration of this ordinance is declared by an unexceptionable witness to be the regular practice of all Christians throughout the world on every Lord's day. The universality of this celebration, at the period specified, proves beyond debate, that it was an original practice of all the apostles.

With these testimonies of the evangelists, and St. Paul before them, the primitive Christians would have certainly seen, that the institution was declared in the four Gospels, particularly in the three first, to have been instituted by Christ antecedently to his death; and accompanied by a command requiring a continual celebration of it by all his followers. In the Acts, and the First Epistle to the Corinthians, it would be seen with equal certainty, that St. Luke and St. Paul declare the celebration to have corresponded exactly with this command, and to have been thus regular and universal from the beginning. Had the apostles then, the only persons who had sufficient authority to introduce an ordinance of religious worship, proposed the institution of this sacrament as a new thing, at any distance of time after the crucifixion; they would have been seen directly to contradict their own assertions, which declared it to be instituted by Christ before his death, and to have been celebrated regularly by themselves from that date. At the same time, they must have attempted to impose another gross and impossible falsehood on their followers; *viz.* that they themselves had also regularly united in this celebration. It is obvious, that an attempt to establish this institution, in such circumstances, would not only have been impracticable, but pre-eminently ridiculous; and equally evident, that no man who seriously made such an attempt could, in a religious service, have any followers.

Thus it is clear, that the Lord's supper was instituted by Christ himself, at the time and in the circumstances specified; that it is a standing, unanswerable proof of his mission, and of the gospel which records it; and that Christians, whenever they celebrate this ordinance, actually *shew forth the Lord's death until he come.*

3. *The institution of this ordinance exhibits, in a strong light, the purity of Christ's character.*

This sacrament was instituted by him as a commemoration of his death; and proves unanswerably, that he foresaw with certainty the time and the manner in which he should die. It proves therefore beyond debate the following things.

First; *That he was a prophet; because he foresaw and*

foretold his death, and the time and the manner in which he was to die.

Secondly; *That his death was voluntary; because with this foresight he might easily have avoided it.*

Thirdly; *That his death was intended to be an atonement for sin;* or, in other words, *his body was broken and his blood shed for many.*

Fourthly; *That he died without a crime.*

No criminal, who can escape the death which rewards his crimes, ever yielded himself to such a death; particularly to one so painful as that upon the cross.

At the same time, no person ever introduced, no person can be supposed to introduce, among any of mankind, much less among his friends and followers, a remembrance of himself as a malefactor, publicly convicted of an infamous crime, and put to death by an infamous punishment. No man ever wished to have any thing remembered concerning himself which was not creditable to his character. Much less would any man become the voluntary recorder of his own guilt, and the remembrancer of his own shame. But here, the death was in the highest degree infamous; solicited by a whole nation and its government; awarded on the charge of a capital crime; and attended with circumstances of singular disgrace, as well as of unexampled suffering. The commemoration of it was instituted by the sufferer, from his own choice merely, with the full knowledge and direct declaration of all these facts; and attended with such circumstances, as to perpetuate the remembrance of them throughout every generation of his followers. He who can believe these things to have been done by an impostor, and to have been recorded and celebrated in a religious service by the followers of an impostor, can believe any thing.

4. *The sacrament is intended to admonish Christians of the second coming of Christ.*

For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come; that is, to the judgment. This passage is an explicit declaration of one of the purposes accomplished by the celebration of the Lord's supper; to wit, *the exhibition of his death, both to themselves*

and to mankind, until his second coming. This exhibition therefore was intended solemnly to remind them of this great truth; *that the same Saviour, whose death they thus celebrate, who was once broken on the cross, and is now symbolically broken before their eyes, will finally appear as the Judge of the quick and the dead.*

No consideration can furnish Christians with higher consolation than this; nor can consolation be furnished in a more proper or impressive manner. He whose love to them was stronger than death; who died for their offences, and rose again for their justification: whose death is in a very affecting, symbolical manner, repeated before them at every celebration of this ordinance; here holds out to them this awful but delightful truth; that he will one day be *their* Judge, as well as the Judge of the world. From a Judge who *loved the church and gave himself for it,* what blessings may Christians not expect hereafter? What blessings are they not here taught to expect? The very ordinance which admonishes them that *he* is to be their Judge, brings all his love before their eyes. *He is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever;* and will entertain for them the same tenderness as when he hung upon the cross. He has promised *never* to *leave* them *nor forsake* them. He has promised that the contribution of *two mites* to his service, and the administration of *a cup of cold water to a disciple,* as such, shall be rewarded by him in the coming world. These promises he here announces to them he will one day come to perform; and will bring with him the same love for them with which he went to his crucifixion. What truth can be more replenished with comfort? How could this truth be declared in a more affecting manner? Every Christian at the sacramental table, solemnly pondering his own sins, and the condemnation to which he is exposed by them, is naturally led to exclaim, *Who is he that condemneth?* and to answer, with hope and exultation, *It is Christ that died.*

5. *The Lord's supper is intended to unite Christians in a known, public, and efficacious, bond of union.*

In a former discourse, I have mentioned *baptism as a sign by which Christians are known to be the followers of Christ;* and then mentioned also the importance of some

public mark of distinction to every standing society of men. The observations which I then made concerning baptism, considered as such a sign, are with the same propriety applicable to the Lord's supper also. But there are some observations relative to this subject which are applicable the Lord's supper only. In baptism, Christians appear as subjects of the ordinance but once in their lives; and most of them at this appearance being infants, are altogether passive. At the Lord's supper they are always voluntary active partakers; and appear often in this character throughout their whole Christian life. They appear at the table of Christ in a body; as members of him the head. They appear as Christian friends and brethren, and are *all members one of another.* They appear as open professors of his religion; as his followers; as attached to his cause; as interested in his death; as expectants of his coming; as voluntary subjects of his government. They exhibit themselves as being united in *one faith, one baptism,* one worship, one system of doctrines and duties, one scheme of communion and discipline; as having one common interest, one common pilgrimage, and one final home. All these things are exhibited and established by the Lord's supper. Where Christians are faithful to themselves, this ordinance separates them, so far as is necessary for their edification, from the world; and becomes the distinctive badge of their character as disciples of the Redeemer.

6. *This sacrament was intended to be a visible and affecting pledge of Christ's love to his followers.*

In the administration of this sacrament, Christ is exhibited as dying on the cross, and as dying for *them.* When he took the bread at its institution, he said, *This is my body, which is broken for you; and this is my blood, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.* The benefits here communicated are of a value which is inestimable. They are benefits communicated to these very persons at an expense unexampled in the universe; and procured by a love which admits no parallel. All the sufferings of Christ were necessary to this end; particularly his sufferings on the cross, the consummation of them all. These sufferings, the bread broken and the wine poured out, present to us in the most lively and affecting images; and

thus set before our eyes, in the strongest manner, that unlimited and divine benevolence by which they were undergone. The language which these symbols speak is always the same. Throughout every age and every land, they declare the same sufferings and the same love; and are thus a monumental pledge of Christ's tenderness to his children to the end of the world.

7. *This sacrament was also designed to edify Christians in the divine life.* The edification of Christians is the increase of justness in their views, of purity and fervour in their affections, and of faithfulness in their conduct with respect to the objects of religion. To this increase, in all respects, the Lord's supper naturally and eminently contributes.

To the justness of a Christian's views it lends important aid by presenting, in a very affecting manner, the atonement of Christ, and all the doctrines connected with it which were mentioned under the first head of this discourse. All these also, and their connexion with this great event, it presents to the mind in the most forcible manner, arresting and engrossing every ingenuous affection. In this manner it leads us, except when under the dominion of a sensual obdurate heart, to ponder all these subjects with deep attention, and a strong sense of our own personal interest in them. Instead of regarding them with loose superficial and transient inquiries, we make them objects of intense study, and most critical investigation. The *love* which *rejoiceth in the truth,* is here excited to an elevation and fervour not easily derived from any other source, and diffuses all its candour and equity over every scrutiny. The Saviour, seen in the most amiable of all characters, and in the most wonderful manifestation of that amiableness, is loved with peculiar ardour: and the mind, feeling at once the duty and excellency of resembling him, naturally labours under the influence of the same disposition which was in him, to *walk as he also walked; to purify* itself, in some measure, *as he is pure;* and to wear an untarnished resemblance of his beauty and glory. It remembers, it feels, what he was, and the duty and desirableness of being like him. In this situation it naturally summons to its aid all the motives to obedience by which it ought to be in-

fluenced; the loveliness of virtue, and the odiousness of sin; the threatenings on the one hand, and on the other the invitations and promises. In the full sight of these, it acquires new vigour, and forms new resolutions; enters upon its duty with alacrity, and pursues it with delight and perseverance. Thus it becomes wiser and better; more fitted to be a blessing here; and more adorned with that beauty and loveliness which prepare it for a triumphant entrance into the everlasting kingdom of its Redeemer.

III. *The qualifications for this ordinance* I shall briefly consider in the following observations.

1. *It is an indispensable qualification for this ordinance, that the candidate for communion be a member of the visible church of Christ in full standing.*

By this I intend, that he shall be such a member of the church as I have formerly described, to wit, *that he should be a person of piety; that he should have made a public profession of religion; and that he should have been baptized.* All these things, if we substitute circumcision for baptism, were required of every Israelite, in order to his acceptable participation of the passover, and to his being and continuing an acceptable member of the Abrahamic church. God formed the church, under the dispensation to Abraham, by natural descent from this patriarch; or rather, he formed the visible church by the ordinance of circumcision, set as a seal according to his own appointment on all its members, constituted originally of all *his* descendants, limited afterward to those of Isaac, and then to those of Jacob. Such of these as did not receive this seal, or in other words were not thus introduced into the visible church, he directed to be cut off from his people. Those who were thus introduced into the visible church, and did not partake of the passover, he commanded also to be punished with the same excision. All the Israelites he farther required to make a public profession of religion, by entering publicly into that solemn covenant with him, which has been so often recited in these discourses, concerning the church and its ordinances, and by *avouching* JEHOVAH *to be their* GOD, *and themselves to be his people.* This covenant they were however required to enter into with re-

ligious sincerity. In the fiftieth psalm it is written, *Unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldest take my covenant into thy mouth?* In other words, "Thou hast no right, no permission, from me, to *take my covenant into thy mouth.*" They were required to enter into covenant with God; and were entitled, in this manner, to all the external privileges connected with this transaction. But they were required also to do this with a spirit of universal obedience. *Thou hast avouched the Lord this day to be thy God,* says Moses to to Israel, *and to walk in his ways, and to keep his statutes, and commandments, and judgments, and to hearken unto his voice; and the Lord hath avouched thee this day to be his peculiar people, as he hath promised thee, and that thou shouldest keep all his commandments.* "And thou shalt swear, The Lord liveth, in truth, *in judgment, and in righteousness,*" said God to Israel, Jer. iv. 2. I have elsewhere shewn, that *to swear, considered as a duty of the people of Israel, is the same thing, as to enter into covenant with God.* These words therefore contained a command to the Israelites, to exercise truth and righteousness in this solemn transaction.

Accordingly, this people are, in a great multitude of passages, severely reproved, threatened, and declared to be punished, because they violated this covenant. See Hosea viii. 1; vi. 4—7; Jer. xxxiv. 18—20; xi. 2, 3; xxii. 8, 9; Ezek. xvii. 15—19; Mal. ii. 8, 9, &c. &c.

That Christians, in making this profession, which I have heretofore shewn to be *their* duty also, are bound to act with sincerity, and to exhibit before the eye of God *truth in the inward parts,* is so plain a case of duty, as hardly to admit of argument or evidence. When, let me ask, ought men to exhibit this truth, if they are not bound to exhibit it here? If the Israelites were severely censured and dreadfully punished for covenanting falsely; this conduct must be still more guilty on the part of those who enjoy the light of the gospel.

Independently of the superior privileges enjoyed by the Christian, the only material difference between him and the Israelites lies chiefly in these two things: *that the Christian is not of course a member of the church by natural*

descent; and that he is not punished with excision for not becoming the subject of the initiatory, and for not attending upon the confirmatory, sacrament. As the circumcised person was required to make a public profession of religion, so is the baptized; and both are equally required to make this profession with sincerity and piety. The baptized person is also required, not only as a rational being under the dispensation of the gospel, but also as a person who by his baptism is brought under new and additional obligations to celebrate the sacramental supper as soon as he becomes possessed of sufficient understanding; to discern its nature and use, and to celebrate it with decency; and, so soon as he shall have sufficient understanding, to make a rational profession of religion, previously indispensable to his participation of this ordinance. This profession, as I have already observed, must spring from piety, and be made with evangelical faith and repentance.

It will probably be here said by baptized persons generally, that they cannot make such a profession, because they are *destitute of faith, repentance, and piety.* To this I answer, that they are inexcusable for not possessing this character. God requires it indispensably of all men; and has laid them under peculiar obligations to assume it, by bringing them into his visible church through the administration of baptism. I know that they will allege here, their inability to become possessed of this character, as their excuse for being destitute of it; for not making a profession of religion; and, consequently, for not communing at the sacramental table. Let me exhort them to remember, that this inability is no other than the common natural disinclination of the human heart to do its duty; the very sin with which they are charged in the Scriptures. Let me exhort them to believe and to feel, that God will not accept this sinful character as an excuse for the omission of this or any other duty.

As the same time, they are bound to remember also, that *this situation will in no degree justify them in making an insincere profession.* This would be only substituting one sin for another: a sin which in my view is of a still grosser nature. That which they are required to do, is not to cease from sin in one form, by perpetrating it in another;

but faithfully to perform their duty. They are bound to make a profession of religion; to make it with the piety of the gospel; and thus to become evangelical communicants at the table of Christ.

It has been supposed, that *because the Jewish circumcised children universally partook of the passover, therefore baptized children ought now universally to partake of the Lord's supper.* To this position I answer, that St. Paul, as was observed in a former discourse, *has directly forbidden believers to hold religious communion with unbelievers;* and by unavoidable consequence, *has forbidden unbelievers to commune at the table of Christ. Unbelieving parents also, he has declared, cannot offer their children in baptism; and that, notwithstanding themselves have been baptized. Plainly then they cannot, for the same reason, offer themselves to God in the covenant of grace; nor appear as qualified communicants at the table of Christ. Unto the wicked,* now as well as anciently, that is to all unbelievers, *God saith, What hast thou to do, that thou shouldest take my covenant into thy mouth?*

As the moral character of man is at the best imperfectly known by himself; and as evangelical assurance is no part of the character of a new convert; *it is an indispensable qualification for communion in the church of Christ, particularly at the sacramental table, that the candidate possess a rational and preponderating persuasion of his own sincere piety.*

*In all cases where certainty is unattainable, no rule exists for our direction but the commanding probability.**

The commanding probability ought therefore to control in this case; because certainty is evidently beyond our reach. The soundness of this rule of our duty may be also illustrated in the following manner. We are absolutely required to offer ourselves up to God in the covenant of grace. *We therefore know certainly, that this is our duty.* In the case supposed, we do not know that we shall make an insincere profession, but *are furnished, by this rational persuasion of our piety, with a commanding probability, that*

* See on this subject the sermon on the truth of God.

our profession will be sincere and acceptable to God. We know that we shall commit sin, if we neglect to make this profession; but we do not know that we shall sin in making it. On the contrary we are furnished with a commanding probability, that if we make a profession of religion in this case, we shall not sin, but perform a service acceptable to God. To do this in the case supposed becomes then, if I mistake not, our unquestionable duty.

The apostles I think certainly acted in accordance with this doctrine. They address the members of the churches founded by them as saints. But when they come to exhibit their character with reference to this subject, they plainly exhibit that this saintship was imperfectly known, either to themselves, or to those in whom it was supposed to reside. A few passages will make this position sufficiently clear. *Examine yourselves,* says St. Paul to the Corinthians, *whether ye be in the faith.* This direction could not I think have been given to persons who were supposed by him who gave it to know themselves to be Christians. Of course, when they were admitted into the church of Christ, they were not admitted because they knew themselves to be Christians, but because they had a fair hope, or a preponderating rational persuasion, that this was their character. But St. Paul received these Christians into the church upon a plan which was accordant with their duty. Of course, it is accordant with our duty to become members of the church, whenever such a persuasion becomes the standing view of our minds. Of the same nature is the direction immediately following this; *Prove your ownselves.*

The same is also implied in the succeeding question, *Know ye not your ownselves, how that Jesus Christ is formed in you, except ye be reprobates:* αδοκιμοι, unapproved.

Of the same nature is the direction given to this church, 1 Cor. xi. 28. *But let a man examine himself; and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.* This direction is plainly given to professing Christians, to enable them to determine whether they are worthy communicants at the table of Christ. But no such examination would be necessary for those to whom the apostle wrote, if at their

admission into the church they knew themselves to be saints; for every saint is essentially a worthy communicant.

By a rational preponderating persuasion, I intend such a one, as is the result of repeated, thorough, solemn self-examination, aided by a faithful resort of books which exhibit the genuine evidences of piety, and by the advice of wise and good men, particularly ministers of the gospel. He who does not in a case of this magnitude seek for all these, is regardless of his own well-being.

SERMON CLXI.

THE EXTRAORDINARY MEANS OF GRACE.

THE LORD'S SUPPER. DISPOSITION WITH WHICH IT IS TO BE ATTENDED; AND MOTIVES TO THE ATTENDANCE.

And as they did eat, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and brake it; and gave to them, and said, Take, eat, this is my body. And he took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and they all drank of it. And he said unto them, This is my blood of the New Testament which is shed for many. And when they had sung a hymn, they went out into the Mount of Olives.—MARK XIV. 22—25.

IN the preceding discourse I proposed to consider,

I. *The nature,* and,

II. *The design, of this ordinance;*

III. *The qualifications necessary for attendance upon it;*

IV. *The disposition with which it is to be attended;* and,

V. *The motives to this attendance.*

The three first of these heads were considered in that discourse. I shall now proceed,

IV. To consider *the disposition with which this ordinance is to be attended.*

By this I mean, *that state of mind with which a person generally qualified in the manner described under the preceding head should celebrate this ordinance.*

This disposition is directly indicated by the injunction, *This do in remembrance of me.* It will not be supposed, that Christ directed us merely to remember him on this occasion; or to remember him with indifference; or distrust; or opposition; or disrespect. The very idea, both of enjoining and of voluntarily engaging in a commemoration, supposes, that there is something great or good in that which is commemorated. Whenever a person is formally and solemnly made an object of commemoration, it is of course implied, that the commemoration is an intentional honour to his character, and that those who thus honour him regard him with sincere affection and respect.

Such being plainly and pre-eminently the nature of this religious rite, we become deeply interested to inquire, *what are especially the constituents of that disposition which we ought to experience while celebrating this ordinance in remembrance of our Saviour?*

To this inquiry I answer,

1. *We are to remember Christ in this ordinance with* ADMIRATION.

Every thing pertaining to the character of this glorious person is fitted to awaken this emotion of the mind. Beside the incomprehensible mysteries of his original character; his incarnation, his life, his death, his love for mankind, his propitiatory sacrifice of himself, his resurrection, his exaltation, and his intercession, are all marvellous beyond measure: and are investigated by angels with astonishment and rapture. Hence his character is declared by the prophet Isaiah, and summoned up by himself when he appeared to Manoah and his wife, in that remarkable name Wonderful. This singular character, containing in itself a combination of all that is great and good, is presented to us in the most affecting manner at the sacramental table; and demands of us the highest exercise of religious admiration. This exercise of the Christian spirit is formed by the union of wonder, reverence, and delight; wonder excited by the greatness of the things which are done; reverence for the exalted character displayed in

doing them; and delight in the manifestations which they contain of mercy and goodness, and in the benefits flowing from them to the innumerable multitude of the first-born. At the sacramental table, the whole character of Christ is brought before our eyes. We behold him here in the act of *giving his life a ransom for many.* Again his body his broken; again his blood is poured out; for the sins of men. His compassion for this ruined world is presented to us in living colours. We cannot fail to remember who it was that thus *loved us, and gave himself for us.* We cannot fail to remember, that he, *who was the brightness of the Father's glory, and upheld all things by the word of his power, by himself purged our sins; and then sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.* We cannot but call to mind, that by him whom we here follow to the cross, *all things were created that are in heaven and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers; that all things were created by him, and for him; that he is before all things; and that by him all things consist.* We cannot fail to recollect, *that he is now head over all things unto the church; having a name above every name which is named in this world or in the world to come; reigning in a kingdom which is an everlasting kingdom; and ruling with a dominion which shall know no end.* We cannot fail to realize, *that the day is approaching in which he will come in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory, with the voice of the archangel and the trump of God;* will summon the dead from their graves; will sit on the throne of judgment, and pronounce the final doom of angels and of men: *while from his face the heavens and the earth will flee away; and no place be found for them any more.* This is the wonderful person, whose sacrifice to himself is symbolized on the altar of Christians; whom we there behold, bleeding, broken, dying, and consigned to the grave. This condescension was exercised, this humiliation was undergone, *from the love wherewith he loved the church, and gave himself for it.* Who, that has any share of the heavenly spirit, can fail to exclaim, in unison with the heavenly host, *Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory,*

and blessing: for he hath redeemed us to God by his blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation, and hath made us kings and priests unto God, even his Father. To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

2. *We are to remember Christ in this ordinance with* GRATITUDE.

That gratitude is to be exercised towards every benefactor, is a doctrine readily acknowledged by all men. Hence in every age, and in every land, where civilization has made even a moderate progress, testimonies of this emotion of the mind have been publicly given to those who were esteemed public benefactors. To heroes and statesmen; to those who have founded beneficent institutions, or otherwise enlarged the means of relief or enjoyment: nay, to such as have merely increased the reputation of a people by efforts of ingenuity; to philosophers and poets; statues have been set up; pillars raised; magnificent sepulchral monuments erected; days set apart to their honour; and festivals instituted in commemoration of what they had done. Yet how few of all these have been real benefactors to mankind! How few of them have done that which a wise man can approve, or a good man be willing to imitate! How few of them have been such as a person of sobriety would cheerfully acknowledge as his own sons! How imperfectly do the best of them resemble HIM *who came to seek and to save that which was lost!* How dimly, how interruptedly, does their benevolence shine, in comparison with the effulgence of the Redeemer; a rushlight trembling and failing in the beams of the sun! At the same time, the benevolence which they really possessed he gave them. The beneficence which they wrought, he enabled them to accomplish. But neither the things which they have spoken, done, or suffered, nor the motives which gave them birth, nor the consequences which they produced, are to be thought of, when placed at the side of those which are here presented to our view. All the writing of philosophers, poets, and orators, are inestimably inferior in wisdom and efficacy to the single sermon of Christ on the mount. A great part of the efforts of statesmen, heroes, and patriots, have been nuisances to the world; and merely

means of raising *them* to distinction and applause. The best of these efforts have been mingled with much folly, and much sin; and have terminated only in little and temporary good. In all that Christ said, supreme wisdom shone; in all that he did and suffered, supreme excellence. His efforts have accomplished the salvation of a world, and produced boundless good to unnumbered millions of rational beings. Disinterestedness immensely glorious illumined his whole life; and encircled him on the cross with intense and eternal splendour. Nothing so beautiful, so lovely, was ever before seen by the universe, or will be seen hereafter. With what emotions, with what praise, with what solemnities ought he then to be commemorated by the race of Adam!

The solemnities with which he is pleased to be commemorated he himself has instituted in this ordinance; simple; obvious; easily comprehensible by the humblest intelligence; coming directly to the heart with a powerful and undiminishing impression. When we assemble to celebrate these solemnities, all the great things which I have specified, are set in full view before our eyes. They are all exhibited also as done for *us*. *Our* souls were sinful, condemned, and lost, equally with those of *others*. We stood on the brink of perdition: and infinitely needed the cleansing of the great sacrifice. There was not an eye to pity, nor an arm to save. We did not even wish, much less did we ask, for deliverance. At that terrible period, unsolicited, undesired, unwelcomed, this immensely glorious Benefactor stationed himself in the gap between us and ruin; and voluntarily became the substitute for sinners. Then God said concerning the soul, *Deliver it from going down to the pit; for I have found a ransom*. The guilt of *our sins* this divine person *washed away in his blood*. The impurity of our character, *the root of bitterness* by which we were *defiled*, he destroyed for ever. The gates of hell to all his sincere followers he finally shut. The doors of heaven he opened with his own hand; destroyed the sting of death, and the victory of the grave; and disclosed the path from that dark and desolate mansion to the world of immortal glory. From this desolate mansion he himself first trode that path; *and went before to prepare a place for them in*

his Father's house. There, on *a throne of glory high and lifted up*, he intercedes for their protection from enemies, their deliverance from sin, and their perseverance in holiness unto the end. To them he calls from that happy world with the unceasing voice of boundless mercy, *Come unto me, all ye that labour, and are heavy laden; and I will give you rest.* There he watches all their *goings; and preserves their feet from falling, their eyes from tears, and their souls from death.* There he marks all their weaknesses, temptations, dangers, and enemies; and says to each, *Hitherto shalt thou come, but no farther.* Thence he stretches out his arm, takes them by the hand, and leads them onward in the path of life. Their sighs he hears; their tears he numbers. Their frail feeble attempts to serve him he records in the book of his remembrance. *The bruised reed* he suffers not to *break*, the flame that feebly trembles on *the smoking flax* he suffers not to expire. Over every enemy he enables them finally to triumph, and from every danger to escape. Through *the valley of the shadow of death* he conducts them with safety and hope; and supported by *his rod and staff*, brings them to the land of light and peace which rises beyond it. There, purified from every stain, error, and imperfection, he admits them to his own *presence where is fulness of joy*, and surrounds them with *pleasures for evermore.*

To provide this train of blessings for them, both here and hereafter, he became a man; an humble, a suffering, dying man; agonized in the garden; expired on the cross; and descended into the grave. Had it been *possible* that these blessings could be procured at less expense, *this cup* would certainly have *passed from him.* In this ordinance then we see the real means of all the good for which Christians hope in this world, and in that to come. Here they behold their suffering Saviour in the very act of purchasing for them eternal glory by his tears and blood. What Christian's heart will not distend; what Christian's bosom will not heave with inexpressible emotions; in the full sight of this amazing object! Who among them will not anticipate the exultation of heaven; and begin the new song on this side of the grave! Who, with a mixture of gratitude and transport, will not exclaim, *Blessing, and*

glory, and honour, and power, be unto him that sitteth on the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever.

3. *We are to appear at the table of Christ with the deepest* HUMILITY.

When we remember the things which Christ has done, we are bound to remember also the character of those for whom they were done. *God commendeth his love to us, in that, while we were yet sinners, he gave his Son to die for us.* Christ commendeth his love to us, in that, while we were yet sinners, he gave himself to die for us. We are bound never to forget that we are of the humblest class of intelligent creatures: born of the earth, and kindred to worms; of yesterday; comparatively knowing nothing; our strength weakness; and our life a vapour. At the same time we are sinners; apostates; rebels against the government of JEHOVAH; condemned by his law; outcasts from his kingdom; and destined to an endless banishment from his presence in the regions of woe.

In this miserable situation of guilt and danger, he was pleased to publish to us the glad tidings of salvation by his beloved Son. But we turned a deaf ear, a hard heart, and a blind mind, to the benevolent proclamation. We said when Christ appeared, *This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be ours.* We had before with bold impiety violated his law. With a corresponding ingratitude we now abused his grace. In the mean time we were of no importance to him. *Of the stones* of the street he could have *raised up* unto himself innumerable *children*, all wiser and better than we, perfectly obedient, excellent, and lovely, instruments of his glory, and objects of his delight, throughout the ages of eternity.

But notwithstanding our insignificance, notwithstanding our provocations, he still had mercy on us; and sent his holy and good Spirit, to enlighten our minds, renew our hearts, and purify our lives. He commissioned his apostles to preach the gospel; established his church; founded the ministry; appointed the ordinances of that worship which he was pleased to accept; and thus disclosed to us the hopes and the means of salvation. All these things also he published and perpetuated in that volume of truth and righteousness which he has announced to us as his

own word. Through the glorious name of him who is broken before us in this ordinance, he has taught us that our humble, faithful, religious services will, notwithstanding all their imperfections, be acceptable to him, and profitable to us. Thus he has exhibited to us infinite compassion, kindness, and forbearance: and all this through the death of *his only begotten and dearly beloved Son.* Nay, this glorious Person with unlimited condescension calls to us, while surrounding his table, *Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If any man will hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.*

Who are we, my brethren, and *what is* our *father's house, that God hath brought us hitherto? For his word's sake, and according to his own heart, has he done all these great things, to make his servants know them.* Who that looks into himself, who that considers how little he is, how prone to error, how perverse, how unbelieving, how obdurate, how worldly-minded, how exceedingly guilty, and therefore how odious in the sight of God; can fail to exclaim to his divine Redeemer, *Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay my hand upon my mouth. I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.*

From this lowly opinion of ourselves, irresistibly awakened by these considerations, naturally springs *condescension and kindness to others.* That pride which here receives so deep a wound, is of all human passions perhaps the most unfeeling, unjust, and abusive. From no source do the poor and powerless suffer more injuries, or injuries fitted to be felt more deeply; nor is any human feeling more unbecoming the character of a man, nor more contrary to that of a Christian. But it seems scarcely possible, that he who solemnly regards the condescension of Christ, so strikingly manifested by this ordinance, should fail to experience the most abasing views of his own pride, and the most exalted views of the excellence of his Redeemer's condescension. It will be difficult for him not to feel that the distance between Christ and himself is infinite; and that that between himself and his humblest neighbour, is nothing. When therefore he beholds this divine Person stooping

immeasurably to regard with kindness a creature so insignificant and unworthy as himself, he cannot but realize both the beauty and the obligation of this glorious example, and be compelled to imitate it in exhibiting kindness and condescension to others.

4. *We are bound, on this occasion also, to form vigorous resolutions of obedience.*

We sit at the table of Christ in the professed character of his disciples. In no situation do we so often or so solemnly profess ourselves to be of this character. But our Saviour says, *If ye love me, keep my commandments.* And again, *Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I have commanded you.* This then is the great end of our profession; the great criterion by which its sincerity is tried. Accordingly St. John says, *Hereby we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.*

All obedience is, to a great extent, dependant for its existence, continuance, and vigour, on the determinations, or, as they are commonly styled, the *resolutions*, of him who obeys. Such resolutions are stations whence our obedience sets out; guides, by which its course is directed; remembrancers, which warn us of our sloth, wanderings, and backslidings; and powerful excitements to diligence and faithfulness in our duty. A solemn resolution is perhaps always given up with reluctance. A resolution often renewed and rendered habitual is hardly given up at all.

But the Lord's supper both requires and enables us to form resolutions of obedience to his commands with a power which may, I think, be pronounced singular. The immeasurable beneficence of Christ is here presented to our view by images of the most persuasive efficacy, making their appeals directly to the heart. When we behold him, who *was* infinitely *rich, for our sakes* voluntarily *becoming* so *poor* and so distressed, *that we through his poverty might become rich* in all good, temporal and eternal; we are forced to ask, *What shall we render to the Lord for all his benefits?* The single word *obedience* involves the whole answer to this question; and comes home to the heart, recommended by all the love of Christ, by all the reasonableness of his commands, and by the divine and immortal rewards which he has promised to those that obey him.

As our obedience is in this forcible manner enjoined, so we are equally required to form those resolutions whence it must spring. We here form them at the foot of the cross; by the side of our expiring Redeemer; in the full prospect of his last agonies; and with the strongest conviction of the immeasurable love which induced him to undergo them. Here therefore our resolutions will be solemn, ardent, firm, and faithful. Of course they will be lasting and operative; neither removed by the wiles of the tempter; nor broken down by tribulation and persecution; nor choked by the cares and the seductions of the present world; *but producing fruit to the glory of our Lord, thirty, sixty, and a hundred fold.*

5. *We are required to appear at the table of Christ with brotherly love.*

One is your master, even Christ, said our Lord to his disciples, *and all ye are brethren.* At this solemn scene Christians appear in this interesting relation more frequently, more publicly, and more intimately, than at any other. They sit around one table, united in one covenant; commune in one worship; celebrate one crucified Saviour; and, through him, are by adoption the children of one common Father. Of course, they are members of the same family; pursue the same interest; walk together in the same narrow way to eternal life; are bound to the same final home; and are heirs of the same delightful inheritance beyond the grave. What considerations can awaken a sense of the fraternal relation, or inspire the spirit of fraternal tenderness, if these fail?

But this is not all. Christ has made brotherly love the immediate and great object of the new commandment. *A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another.* This he said immediately after he had ended the first celebration of the sacred supper. The precept, in itself glorious, derives a peculiar lustre from the time when it was given; and, endeared to us from its own nature, is pre-eminently endeared by the occasion out of which it immediately sprang. Accordingly, our Saviour, who chose this solemn, interesting period of his life as the proper season to publish it, seized the occasion also to enforce it upon his followers; and subjoined, *as I have loved you, that ye also*

love one another. What Christian, in the full view of this argument, can fail to exercise the heavenly disposition required by this peculiarly divine precept; especially when he has before his eyes, in these solemn symbols, the transcendent love of his Saviour to him, exhibited in colours of life?

But this is not all. The same glorious person taught us, at the same time, that *the exercise of brotherly love would be, through every age, the standing and decisive proof of our discipleship. Hereby,* he added, *shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.* From the conformity of our character to this precept, from our resemblance to his character, all men, however prejudiced, however hostile to Christianity, would be compelled to perceive the sincerity of our profession, the reality of our religious character, and of course the reality of the religion which we profess. Exactly accordant with this declaration of Christ has been the fact throughout every age of the church. The brotherly love of Christians, wherever it has existed with vigour and operated with activity, has been to the world the controlling proof of the reality and the heavenly origin of the Christian religion: a proof without which, it is to be feared, all the other arguments, although completely unanswerable, would have been insufficient to convince, and still more to persuade, mankind. If then we love the cause of the Redeemer, and wish to uphold his religion in the world; if we love the souls of men, and wish them to embrace the religion which came down from heaven; if we love the immortal welfare of our fellow-creatures, and wish them to become heirs of the happy world where that welfare is consummated; we shall feel ourselves, on this account also, compelled to cherish and to exert this angelic disposition.

Even this is not all. *Brotherly love is made in the Scriptures a decisive proof to ourselves, as well as to others, that we are the disciples of Christ. We know,* says St. John, *that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.* If then we desire peace of mind, a supporting hope of the divine favour, the delight which springs from a consciousness of forgiven sin, and an animating foretaste of

glory beyond the grave; we shall be powerfully quickened to fulfil this benevolent command of the Redeemer.

All these considerations are presented to us in the strongest manner by this divine ordinance. At the sacramental table, in the near prospect of his own death, at the very entrance upon those agonies by which the expiation of sin was completed, this delightful precept was given by the Redeemer. Here therefore, at every season of communion, our Lord may be justly considered as renewing the precept to *us*, and as pointing to all the affecting considerations by which it is enforced. At the head of his followers HE now sits, at every celebration of this ordinance; and, addressing them with infinite tenderness, says, *A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.*

6. *We are bound to appear at the table of Christ with a universal good-will to our fellow-men.*

We are here presented with a most affecting exhibition of the love of Christ to us and to others. He loved *us* while we were strangers to the covenant of promise, aliens from his church, enemies to his mission and character, *without hope and without God in the world.* He loved us with an eternal and unchangeable love; a love springing only from the benevolence of his nature; a love *stronger than death*, and triumphing over the grave. He loved us *not in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth;* with an efficacious love, productive of the highest beneficence on his part, and of the richest hopes and blessings on ours.

He has required, that *the same mind be in us which was also in him; and that we should walk even as he walked.* The love which he has exercised towards us therefore, we are required to exercise towards our fellow-men universally, whether friends or enemies. This love, like his, is to be vigorous; intense; always operative; perpetually productive of relief to the distressed, reformation to the sinful, improvement to the virtuous, instruction to the ignorant, and comfort to all with whom we are concerned. It is to be disinterested; expansive; unceasing, and superior to bigotry, prejudice, resentment, and every other selfish consideration. For the exercise of both these last last-mentioned affections,

this ordinance furnishes an opportunity singularly happy. The example which it sets before us, the precepts which it irresistibly calls to our minds, and the powerful appeal which it makes to our hearts, in the aptness and energy of its symbols, awaken of course the best affections, wherever they dwell; and open the hands with a divine instinct, wherever they have been trained to the glorious habit of doing good. Here then we are to exercise the spirit from which all beneficence springs. Here we are to commence the evangelical purpose of relieving distress and promoting comfort; to fix the controlling resolution, and to go forth to the divine employment of producing happiness and effectuating reformation. Here particularly is to be begun and advanced, the illustrious charity towards *the household of faith* so extensively urged in a former discourse, and destined by the Redeemer to cheer the pilgrimage of his poor, humble, suffering followers, styled by him *the least of his brethren*, by relieving their wants, multiplying their comforts, and brightening their path to heaven with hope and joy.

V. *Of the motives which should influence us to the celebration of the Lord's supper*, I shall mention the following.

1. *The command of Christ.*

The precept, *This do in remembrance of me*, is possessed of divine authority; of the same authority with that which requires us to *love the Lord our God with all the heart.* The same disposition which would prompt us to obey God in any case, would induce therefore to obey him in this. If we reverence our Creator at all; if we regard at all the character and mission of our Redeemer; we shall exhibit this spirit as uniformly, as faithfully, as cheerfully, in our obedience to this institution, as in that which we render to any other. In vain, I fear, shall we plead a disposition to obey God in any thing, if we disobey him in this; or that we remember the Redeemer with any evangelical regard, if we are indisposed to remember him in an institution, so solemn, so affecting, so endearing.

2. *The honour of Christ.*

Christ has required us to do this in remembrance of him. If then we celebrate this ordinance in obedience to his com-

mand, we shall celebrate it in remembrance of Christ, with a design to honour him in our own hearts, and in the sight of others. When we call to mind who it is to whom we render this honour, what he has done and what he has suffered for our sakes; what is the character of those for whom all this was done; and what is the nature, the number, and the magnitude, of those blessings which these sufferings have procured for his followers; we cannot fail to perceive, that not authority only, but benevolence also, benevolence operating in the most glorious manner, demands our obedience to this injunction of the Redeemer. Every ingenuous feeling of man is here addressed in the most forcible manner. The authority from which this precept proceeds, is the highest. The beneficence which enforces it, is unrivalled. Reverence for this authority, and gratitude for this beneficence, combine their obligatory power to produce in mankind a faithful and cheerful obedience to this precept. If we are not obedient here, our *neck* must be *an iron sinew*. If we are not grateful here, well may the Redeemer exclaim, *The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib, but Israel doth not know; my people doth not consider*.

To bring this subject home to your hearts, behold your Redeemer nailed to the cross. For whom was his body broken? For whom was his blood poured out? Who were the *lost* beings whom he came to *seek and to save*, and for whom *he gave his life a ransom?* On whose account was he forsaken of his Father? For whom did he give up the ghost, and descend to the grave? Whose sins did he wash away? For whom did he shut the gates of perdition, and open the door of endless life? Those who are now before me are the immortal, guilty, ruined beings for whom all this was done. You are the very sinners whom he came to redeem from the sins of this life, and the sorrows of that which is to come. To you he now proffers all the blessings of his mediation: the forgiveness of sin; the renovation of the soul; the hope, the peace, and the joy, which flourish with undecaying beauty in a pious mind; the guidance, the support, and the consolations, of his own Spirit; and an interest in his everlasting love. You, he wished, he labours, to constitute sons, and *kings, and priests, to God our Father;* and holds out to your acceptance crowns of immortal glory.

Reject him; and you are *poor, and wretched, and miserable, and blind, and naked,* and *in want of all things.* Receive him; and *all things are yours.* Let me now ask you, Are you reluctant to glorify this divine Benefactor? Are your hearts insensible to these obligations, and to the immeasurable love from which they have flowed? Has sin palsied all your affections? Has the icy hand of spiritual death frozen your moral powers; and changed you into moving images of the dead? Does the voice of mercy sound here over a cemetery; and waste itself on the inhabitants of the grave?

Let the hearts of Christians *burn within* them, while Christ meets them at his table, and converses with them on all the agonies of the cross, on all the wonders of redeeming love, and on all the glories of that happy world to which he is *gone before to prepare a place for* their final residence. Let them listen with transport while he declares to them, *If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am ye may be also,* and let them exclaim, *Amen, even so; come, Lord Jesus.*

3. *The benefits derived by the church from the celebration of this ordinance, present another powerful motive to the performance of the duty in question.*

He who *loves the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity,* will love his church; the religion which it professes; and the ordinances by which that religion is upheld in the world. Among these ordinances, none has a more direct, a more happy, influence upon the church than the Lord's supper. In the preceding discourse I have mentioned, that it was the design of this institution to unite Christians in a known, public, and efficacious, bond of union. Here, I then observed, they appear often actively; publicly as one body as professors of his religion; as his followers and his friends. Here they exhibit themselves as united in one faith, as having one common interest, and as bound to one final, everlasting home.

Another design, as I observed at that time also, was to edify Christians in the divine life, by improving their views, their affections, and their conduct, with respect to the objects of religion. In both these respects, this ordinance is of incalculable importance to the church.

At the table of Christ chiefly, after their baptism, Christians are seen, and see each other, as a public body; as mutual friends and as followers of the Lamb. Here mutually they give and receive countenance and resolution; worship together as Christians only; rejoice together; weep together; and universally exercise the Christian graces, invigorated, refined, and exalted, by the sympathy of the gospel. Here the social principle of the intelligent nature ascends to the highest pitch of dignity and excellence of which in this world it is capable. Mind here refines, enlarges, and ennobles, mind; virtue purifies and elevates virtue; and evangelical friendship not only finds and makes friends, but continually renders them more and more worthy of the name.

In the mean time, the church as a body is here most happily prepared for such events as in the present world it is taught to expect by the word of God. Prosperity it is prepared to receive with moderation, gratitude, and praise. Adversity it is fitted to meet with patience and submission, with serenity and firmness. In every revival of religion, it is enabled to exult with thanksgiving; over every decay of this divine influence, to mourn and to pray with sympathetic tenderness. Thus for all its duties the church finds here a preparation indispensable to the best performance of them, and motives to fidelity in this performance immense in their importance, and appealing directly to the best affections of the heart.

He who loves the prosperity of the divine kingdom, who seeks to promote the strength and stability of the church, and who feels an evangelical desire to increase these invaluable blessings to his fellow-Christians, will find in these considerations a motive more than sufficient to the faithful performance of the duty in question. By the frequent celebration of the Lord's supper, every communicant continually beholds the church a compact body, possessed of all the strength, firmness, and energy, which result from the cordial union of many in a great and good design. Without this blessing Christians are feeble, because they are solitary; and are easily broken down, because they are destitute of mutual support, counsel, and sympathy. The benefits which result to *wise* or religious *men* from *walking*

with others who are also *wise*, I have elsewhere displayed. Suffice it here to say, that these benefits are peculiarly found in communion at the table of Christ.

4. *Another powerful motive to the performance of this duty will be found by every Christian in his own personal good.*

No exercises of the Christian life are ordinarily more pure, vigorous, and evangelical, than those which are experienced at the sacramental table. The sense which we here feel of our guilt, danger, and helplessness, is apt to be vivid and impressive in an unusual degree. Equally impressive are the views which we form of forgiving, redeeming, and sanctifying love. Here godly sorrow for sin is powerfully awakened. Here are strongly excited complacency in the divine character, admiration of the riches of divine grace, and gratitude for the glorious interference of Christ in becoming the propitiation of our sins. Here brotherly love is kindled into a flame; and benevolence, warm, generous, and expansive, learns to encircle the whole family of Adam. Here, more perhaps than any where else, Christians *have the same mind which was also in Christ*, and prepare themselves to *walk as he walked*. Every evangelical affection here becomes vigorous and active, virtuous resolutions stable, and the purposes of the Christian life exalted.

By the influence of these affections, the views of every good man concerning religious truth become gradually purified; and his willingness to receive entire the humbling, painful doctrines of the gospel, is insensibly increased.

In the prayers particularly and thanksgivings which are offered up on this occasion; prayers rendered by the occasion itself peculiarly humble and sincere; thanksgivings, by the same means, made ardent, unreserved, and elevated, the mind is prone to feel a sublimity of devotion, an evangelical refreshment, a heavenly rapture, not often, it is believed, found elsewhere.

By all these means *a Christian is furnished* in the celebration of this ordinance, perhaps more frequently than in any other situation, *with supporting evidence of his religious character*. He finds here the lively, and therefore the distinguishable, exercises of a good mind; that disposition, particularly to obey God, which is the soul of his religion,

and without a conviction of which all things else, commonly considered as evidences of piety, must stand for nothing; and with a rational conviction of which all these things are chiefly unnecessary. The existence of this disposition he also finds most happily evinced by its increasing strength; the best, the indispensable evidence that it has begun to exist. Multitudes of good men obtain this invaluable blessing here, who elsewhere look and sigh for it in vain. There is scarcely a greater discouragement to him who has entertained comfortable hopes of being a religious man, than the regular destitution of these blessings at the sacramental table. Graces, and hopes, and comforts, which elsewhere decay, almost always revive here; not indeed regularly at every celebration of this ordinance; but at certain happy seasons, returning so often, as at least to prevent the Christian from entire despondence, and usually so as to furnish him with a good degree of resolution in the course of his duty.

How much such beings as we are need *all these benefits* it is hardly necessary to remark. Should any Christian who is present hesitate concerning this subject; let me request him to remember the sorrows, doubts, and despondencies, of the Psalmist; a man after God's own heart; a man inspired; a man often furnished with eminent tokens of the divine favour. Let him listen to the complaint of his fellow-Christians; and learn from their own mouths their lukewarmness, their sloth, their reluctance to their duty, *their slowness of heart to believe*, and their general self-condemnation; together with the fears, and doubts, and melancholy forebodings, springing from these unhappy sources. Let him finally remember, how often himself has suffered, when temptations arrested him; his resolution became enfeebled; apprehensions multiplied; hope gradually receded from his sight; faith lost its hold on the divine promises; and he appeared to himself as vibrating between earth and heaven, and as a settled inhabitant of neither. If with these things in full view he is at a loss concerning the importance of the blessings which I have recited, it will I am afraid be difficult, if not impossible, to explain to him their inestimable value.

REMARKS.

From the observations which have been made in these discourses I deduce,

1. *The wisdom of this institution.*

The ends proposed in the institution of the Lord's supper by the Redeemer of mankind, are certainly of a most benevolent and glorious nature, and peculiarly worthy of the all-perfect mind. They are the enlargement and rectification of our views concerning the noblest of all subjects, the purification of our affections, and the amendment of our lives. The means by which these ends are accomplished, are equally efficacious and desirable. They are, at the same time, simple; intelligible to the humblest capacity; in no respect burdensome; lying within the reach of all men; incapable of being misconstrued without violence; and therefore not easily susceptible of mystical or superstitious perversion. In their own proper undisguised nature, they appeal powerfully to the senses, the imagination, and the heart, and at the same time enlighten in the happiest manner the understanding. Accordingly Christians in all ages have regarded this sacrament with the highest veneration; have gone to the celebration with hope; attended it with delight; and left it with improvement in the evangelical character. God has been glorified by it in a peculiar manner. The numbers, virtues, and comforts, of his children have been increased: and the religion of the cross has been enabled to triumph over the callous, obdurate heart.

2. *These observations strongly enforce the duty of preparing ourselves for every celebration of this ordinance.*

This duty, as every person may easily see, is powerfully urged by almost every thing which has been said in these discourses; by the solemnity of the command; by the nature and design of the institution; by the nature of the disposition with which we are required to attend it; by the numerous and important benefits which it confers, and peculiarly by the glorious character of the Saviour by whom it was enjoined.

The only manner in which we can rationally hope to fulfil these duties, or share in these blessings, is the faithful celebration of the ordinance itself. To such a celebration it is ordinarily indispensable, that we make ourselves ready for the performance of this duty. He who comes to the sacramental table with a thoughtless, indifferent, worldly spirit, may expect to go from it without profit, and without comfort. Nay, more; as he comes with an unworthy disposition, he is bound to believe, that he will *eat and drink judgment to himself.* The merely external performance of any duty, neither promises nor conveys any blessing to the performer. The road to all blessings is obedience; and obedience always has its seat in the heart.

The proper means of preparing ourselves for the Lord's supper are, solemn contemplations on the great subjects of it; the attentive reading of the Scriptures, or other religious books; particularly those parts of them which are employed upon the sacrifice of the cross, and the love of the Redeemer; self-examination; and prayer. *Let a man examine himself,* says St. Paul, *and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body:* that is, not distinguishing the true nature and design of this ordinance. The solemn contemplation, the diligent reading, which I have recommended, are indispensable means of this discernment; as self-examination is to a knowledge of the views and disposition of our own minds. Prayer, though not the only, is beyond a doubt the best, mode of self-examination. In the awful presence of JEHOVAH, while employed in the confession of our sins, and supplication for his mercy, we cannot avoid feeling our own unworthiness, the reality, multitude, and aggravation, of our sins, and the necessity of his grace to give us the victory over them; a candour and an integrity of investigation not easily attainable in any other situation. With these means faithfully employed we may humbly hope for just apprehensions concerning this solemn ordinance; evangelical dispositions in our attendance upon it; and that blessing of God which will make it efficacious to our comfort, peace, and advancement, in the divine life.

When the glorious person whom *God has set king upon*

his holy hill of Zion comes in to see the guests at his table; how delightful will it be to each of us, my brethren, to be found by him clad in the robe of righteousness, and thus prepared to receive him with the honour which is his due! How delightful to be welcomed by him to his table, and received with smiles of complacency! How distressing, on the contrary, how dreadful, to appear before him *without a wedding garment!* Who must not be *speechless*, when he sternly and awfully demands the cause of this unseemly and irreverent appearance? Who must not be overwhelmed with anguish and dismay to hear pronounced concerning himself the terrible sentence, *Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth?*

SERMON CLXII.

THE EXTRAORDINARY MEANS OF GRACE.

THE DISCIPLINE OF THE CHURCH.

Moreover, if thy brother trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church. But if he shall neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man, and a publican.—MATT. XVIII. 15—18.

IN the six preceding discourses, I have considered at length two ordinances of the Christian church, commonly styled sacraments; to wit, *baptism, and the Lord's supper.* I shall now proceed to the consideration of another, and the only remaining ordinance peculiar to that body; to wit, *Christian discipline.*

In examining this subject, I shall endeavour to point out,

I. *The duties to be done,*

II. *The manner in which,*

III. *The ends for which,* and

IV. *The persons by whom, they are to be done;* and,

V. *The motives to the performance.*

I. The particular duties to be done in the course of Christian discipline are,

1. *What may be called private remonstrance.*

If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. The ground of proceeding here, as stated by our Saviour, is an actual trespass of one member of the church against another. *It is a trespass,* Εαν δε αμαρτηση εις σε ὁ αδελφος σου, *If thy brother sin against thee.* If he commit a serious fault. The mere operations and evidences of those infirmities which are common to good men as well as others are no part of this ground; and furnish no warrant for the proceeding. Zealous persons are often ready to construe every such infirmity into a serious transgression, and to swell *pence* owed to themselves into the value of *talents.* In this manner they degrade religion into a spirit of captiousness; and, as far in them lies, employ the authority of the church as an engine to gratify their own unreasonable passions, and to disturb the peace of their neighbours. The same things are also true of persons of a peculiarly exact and rigid character; who often demand, that their fellow-Christians should walk by rules formed by themselves; and appear to feel as if themselves had been constituted definitive judges concerning the Christian privileges of other men.

It must be a fault actually committed. If thy brother trespass against thee; that is, in reality. It must not be a mere object of suspicion or belief. It is easy for to us to injure a Christian brother by our unjust suspicion, more than he would have injured us had he committed the very fault of which we suspect him. We are therefore to be assured of

the fact, before we take any measures of a disciplinary nature. It will always be mischievous to others, as well as disgraceful and injurious to ourselves, to create faults for them by the indulgence of our own passions and prejudices, as well as to suppose them without ample proof.

When such assurance and such proof have been obtained, *the person against whom the trespass is committed is here required to go and tell it to the offending party in a manner absolutely private.* No persons are to be witnesses of the interview. Here he is to explain, without communicating his design to any other person, his own views concerning the trespass, and the proper conduct to be adopted by way of reparation. He is bound to see, that these views are conformed to the gospel; and that both the temper and the language are such as the gospel requires; meek; gentle; unoffending; calculated not to irritate or alienate, but to convince, persuade, and conciliate. No strife is permitted by our Saviour to arise here; no provocation; no unkindness. In this manner, it is ever to be remembered, the offending brother will be gained, if gained at all.

If the spirit of the gospel were allowed to operate with its whole efficacy; every debate of this nature would terminate here. Unhappily such is not always the case. Our Saviour, foreseeing this state of things, has provided for it the best remedy which the human character and circumstances will admit. He has in the text directed the person against whom the trespass is committed, *to take, after having failed to obtain reparation, one or two other members of the church, and with their aid to renew his efforts for the same desirable purpose of gaining the trespassing brother.* These brethren are called in for two purposes. One is; *that they may be witnesses of every thing which pertains to the existing state of the transaction.* The other is; *that the weight of their character, and the wisdom of their counsels, may influence the trespasser to such future conduct towards his brother, as will become his Christian profession.* The former of these purposes is directly expressed in the text. The latter is plainly involved in the phraseology, *and if he neglect to hear them.* This supposes these brethren to use their advice and persuasion, and of course the weight of their character, for a right and happy termination of the controversy.

From this view of the subject it is obvious, that the persons called in for this purpose should possess a character unexceptionable; particularly in the eye of the trespasser; that they should be persons of weight, wisdom, moderation, and gentleness; and sufficiently disinterested to consult the good of both parties with benevolence and impartiality. As these are the men whom a trespasser will hear, if he will hear any man; so the injured brother is plainly bound to call to his aid men of this description for the adjustment of his controversy. It is hardly necessary to add, that both parties are bound to listen with meekness, candour, and cordiality, to the counsels of these brethren.

2. *The next step in the progress of ecclesiastical discipline is* ADMONITION.

It may be, it sometimes is, the fact, that the trespasser will not listen to private remonstrance in either of these forms. In this case our Saviour directs the injured brother to bring his cause to the church. *And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church.* I shall hereafter inquire into the meaning of the word *church* in this place, and shall presume here, that the first application to be made in this case is to the *body*, commonly denoted by the word in our own country. This body is bound to receive, hear, and adjust, the cause.

Should the accused person be found guilty of the fault laid to his charge; it becomes the duty of the church solemnly to admonish him of his sin, and the absolute necessity of atoning for it by making the proper reparation with the spirit of the gospel.

3. *The next step in the process is excommunication.*

It is reasonably expected, that any member of a church will listen to the voice of the whole body of his fellow-Christians with whom he is in immediate communion. Accordingly the process of discipline almost always terminates here with admonition. Still there are cases in which, either from an apprehension of being innocent, or what is probably more frequent, as well as more unhappy, from passion, pride, and obstinacy, the trespasser refuses to hear even the solemn voice of this tribunal. In such cases, the church is directed to withdraw from him all Christian privileges, so far as their own communion is concerned,

or their power extends. *Let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican.* These words, as you well know, denoted to a Jew, the worst of his fellow-men. Among such men the trespasser is henceforth to be accounted by those whom he has refused to hear; and, in my view, by all who consider their system of proceedings as evangelical.

This sentence is commonly spoken of as twofold, *the greater excommunication, and the less:* the latter not uncommonly termed *suspension.* The difference between them is this. In the latter, a person is suspended from the privileges of church-membership for a period; sometimes however an indefinite one; with a hope plainly intimated, that he will ere long return to his duty. In the former, he is absolutely excluded from all the peculiar privileges of the church, without any apparent expectation, that he will be reinstated in them again.

This sentence existed among the ancient Jews, and the ancient Christians; has been continued in the Greek and Romish churches; and exists among the various Protestant churches, with different degrees of formality and severity. It was in use even among the Heathen; and is now one of the most terrible punishments inflicted in Hindoostan. Among the Jews, Greeks, and Romanists, and even in the English church, it is followed by terrible consequences, as well as attended by several circumstances to which the Scriptures, so far as I can perceive, give no countenance. In some cases it has been accompanied by dreadful imprecations; and followed in some by a variety of civil disabilities and sufferings, in themselves unjust and inhuman, and wholly unwarranted by Christ or his apostles. In this country, the Scriptures are allowed to control exactly every thing relating to this subject. Christ directs in the text, that the person who refuses to hear the church, shall be considered by it as a heathen man and a publican. St. Paul directs the church to *mark them that cause divisions, and avoid them,* Rom. xvi. 17. *To withdraw from a brother who walks disorderly,* 2 Thess. iii. 6. *and to reject, after the first and second admonition, a heretic, or a person who creates division among its members.* Titus iii. 10.

In all these directions nothing is warranted, beyond a single refusal upon the part of the church, to admit the of-

fending brother to a participation of its peculiar privileges. The crimes are all specified; and, in my opinion, we have no right to add to their number. The punishment is specified; and we have no right to add to its severity. The reason is plain; all the authority which the church possesses, it derives solely from Christ; and can exercise no more than is given. It can constitute no new crimes; and form, if I may be allowed the expression, no constructive treasons. It can add no new modes of punishment. Contempt therefore, exhibited in a bishop's court, an offence wholly of a civil nature, cannot be a proper foundation for this punishment. Nor can imprisonment, or any other infliction of the magistrate, be connected lawfully with excommunication. These, and all other things of the like nature, I consider as unhappy relics of preceding and very unhappy times.

St. Paul, 1 Cor. v. 12, directs the brethren of that church *not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner, with such a one no not to eat.* These words contain an additional punishment to that which is inflicted under the directions quoted above: and require Christians, in the cases specified, not voluntarily to have intercourse with church-members excommunicated for these crimes. I say, *excommunicated for these crimes*, because St. Paul supposes the persons referred to to be severally guilty of them. But this cannot be lawfully supposed until it is proved before the church, the proper tribunal: when, if unrepented of, it is followed of course by a sense of excommunication. In this decision of St. Paul, all such intercourse is plainly forbidden, as involves more countenance, and expresses less disapprobation, of the offender, than voluntarily eating with him at a common meal. It is I think reasonably supposed, that persons excommunicated for other crimes, plainly equivalent in degree to those which are here specified, are to be treated in the same manner. The word πορνος in this text denotes any incontinent person.

In a preceding discourse, I considered the relation which persons baptized in their infancy, sustain to the church of Christ, and deferred the question concerning *the*

manner in which they are to be affected by the discipline of the church. On this subject I shall now make a few observations.

In the first place, *it is evident that such persons cannot be excommunicated.*

This is obvious from the fact, that the body of which they are members can never be summoned together to hear their cause and pass sentence upon them: and from the additional fact, that no part of this body is warranted to act for the whole. This I suppose to be a part, and a wise one, of the ecclesiastical system of the gospel; indispensable perhaps to the prosperity of religion, as well as to the peace of mankind.

Secondly. *The discipline of all such persons, during the years of minority, is committed supremely to their parents and guardians.*

Now, says the apostle, *I say, that the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all; but is under tutors and governors, until the time appointed of the father,* Gal. iv. 1, 2. Here the apostle teaches us, that so long as we are children, we are under the absolute control of our parents; even as servants are under that of their masters; and are obliged to obey not only them, but also such tutors and governors as they are pleased to appoint over us. In Col. iii. 20 he commands, *Children, obey your parents in all things;* and subjoins, *for this is well pleasing unto the Lord.* Were the church to interfere directly in the government of persons thus situated; two independent jurisdictions would exist over the same subject, at the same time, and with respect to the same things. These in their exercise could not, from the infirmities of human nature in its best form, fail to clash in many instances. If both jurisdictions are rightful and scriptural, the child would not know which to obey. But the Scriptures have settled this point, by requiring him to obey his parents in all things, and informing him that this is well pleasing unto the Lord. Hence I infer, that the direct jurisdiction of the church over the child must be merely nominal; and can exist to no valuable purpose.

Thirdly. *The church possesses an indirect control over the*

child, by the control which it has over the parents; and this it is bound to exercise in every proper manner.

The parents are members of a particular church, and therefore subject to its discipline. Every church is accordingly bound to require such parents as are members of it to instruct and govern their children; and to walk before them agreeably to the gospel. The church is bound to see that all this is actually done; and to call to a solemn account all its members who neglect or violate these duties. This is a control which if duly exercised cannot fail of being beneficial to the children. Any other must, I think, be of course injurious.

Fourthly. *The several members of a church are, in my view, bound also to reprove and admonish baptized persons whom they see in the commission of sin.*

Thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, said God to the Israelites, *and not suffer sin upon him;* or, as in the margin, *that thou bear not sin for him.* This rule appears to have the fullest application to the case in hand. Baptized persons have a peculiar claim on professing Christians for this office of love; and are bound to receive it with humility and reformation.

Ministers ought in my view to make it a business of their ministerial office, distinctly to unfold to them the nature of their relation to God and his church; and solemnly to enforce on them the duties arising from this relation: particularly the duties of repentance and faith in the Redeemer, of giving themselves up to God in his covenant, and taking upon themselves openly the character of Christians. This I apprehend should be done not only from the desk, but in a regular course of laborious catechetical instruction. The same things should be explicitly and solemnly enjoined from time to time upon their parents; one of whose first duties it is, in my apprehension, to cooperate faithfully with their ministers in teaching and enjoining these things upon their children. Were these things begun as soon as the children were capable of understanding them, and pursued through every succeeding period of their nonage; a fair prospect, as it seems to me, would be opened for the vigorous growth and abundant fruitfulness of this nursery of the church.

Should baptized persons with these advantages conduct themselves frowardly in a course of open, obstinate iniquity, after they have come to years of discretion; the church may, with the strictest propriety, shut them out from these privileges, until by a penitent and becoming deportment they shall manifest their contrition for their guilty conduct; not, however, without previous and ample admonition. I will farther suggest, that in my own view it is a part of the duty of each church, at their meetings for evangelical conversation and prayer, to summon the baptized persons who are minors to be present at convenient seasons, while the church offers up prayers to God peculiarly for them; and to pray for them particularly at other meetings holden for these purposes.

Were all these things regularly and faithfully done (and they all seem to grow out of the circumstances of persons baptized in their infancy), I cannot help believing, that a new face would, in a great measure, be put upon the condition and character of the persons in question. It must be acknowledged, that much less attention is paid to them in modern than in ancient times; at least by churches in general; and less I think by ourselves than by our ancestors.

II. *The manner in which discipline is to be conducted next claims our attention.*

Concerning this subject, there can be little debate or doubt. We are abundantly taught by the Scriptures, that private remonstrance and public admonition are ever to be administered with lowliness of mind, with entire candour and moderation; with unbiassed equity; with a spirit of meekness, patience, and forbearance. *The servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle to all men;* and must here be especially upon his guard against the intrusion of every passion, and the adoption of all improper conduct; because here, as he is obliged to assume some degree of authority, and is at times employed in endeavouring to redress injuries which himself has received, he will be in peculiar danger of departing from his duty. A false step, at the commencement of this process in private remonstrance, is eminently mischievous; because from this commence-

ment the whole process is apt to derive its character. Yet here, such a step is ordinarily to be expected more than in any subsequent stage of the progress. The remonstrant is often wholly inexperienced in business of this nature; often personally interested; usually in some degree agitated, and therefore in danger of being off his guard; frequently ignorant of what is precisely his duty; possessed of an authority in a great measure undefined, except by his own discretion; and this discretion less perfect in many cases than could be wished. Thus circumstanced, the best and wisest men are in some danger of acting with impropriety; while others, of an inferior character, are proportionally more exposed. It is ever to be remembered here, that this is the stage of ecclesiastical discipline peculiarly attended with hopes of success. While the subject of remonstrance is concealed from the view of the public; pride, that insidious enemy of all men, even the best; the desire of self-justification; the fear of losing one's character in the view of one's family, friends, and neighbours; and the heat and obstinacy produced in the course of a controversy already advanced, are not here, unless by some unhappy imprudence, roused to any great degree of exertion. If the mind is ever calm and self-possessed, it is at this time. If hope is to be ardently indulged any where, it is here. Let the remonstrant therefore remember, and let those who accompany him remember also, that here they are either to gain or lose their brother. With an object of this inestimable importance before them, there will ever be reason to hope that the fault will not be theirs.

Here I beg leave to give it as my own opinion, founded as I trust both on the Scriptures and experience, that *private controversies between individuals of the church, arising from supposed personal offences, should, as far as may be without refusing the right of appeal to the church, be terminated without being brought to its decision.* This I take to be the very spirit of the text. It is intended by our Saviour, that the offender should hear and yield to those brethren who accompany the remonstrant. St. Paul also, finding fault with the Corinthian Christians for *going to law before the unjust, and not before the saints,* says, *Do ye not know, that the saints shall judge the world;* and, *if the*

world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? If then ye have judgments of things pertaining to this life, set them to judge who are least esteemed in the church. I will not stay to comment on the translation of these verses, although I think it incorrect; because every translation of them will coincide with my own design. It is this, that the controversies between individual Christians, the secular controversies, especially are here directed by St. Paul to be brought for decision before other members of this church; and, according to the present version, before those even of little estimation for their attainments in the view of the church. If the Corinthians were to issue their personal controversies in this manner, it is plainly reasonable and proper, that ours should be issued in a similar manner. If those, who possessed an humble character in the eyes of the Corinthian church, were competent to determine *their* controversies; the superior members of our own churches are certainly competent to determine *ours.*

Experience has in my view long since proved, that controversies of this nature are apt to be begun with resentment, and maintained with violence; and to wear at their commencement, and throughout their progress, the aspect of a common litigation. Of course, they are often attended with all the evils of such a litigation, and many more; are carried on with bitterness and animosity, and end in rivetted hatred; are the means of impairing Christianity in the parties, of leading them into many and great sins, and of leaving them in a state little fitted for improvement or comfort, of splitting a church into divisions, and of injuring, if not destroying, the usefulness of its minister. At the same time, they disturb the peace of a neighbourhood; expose the Christian character to shame, disgust, and reprobation; wound the prosperity of religion; and become a subject of triumph to the worst of its enemies.

Admonition and excommunication should be administered with the same dispositions which have been mentioned as proper accompaniments of private remonstrance; united with a solemnity, firmness, and authority, becoming the character of a church. To the dignity of this tribunal, calmness, moderation, and tenderness, are indispensable. The

wisdom which should preside in it is that *which is from above, pure, peaceable, gentle, and easily entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.*

Before this tribunal also, *no causes should be permitted to come to trial of which the subjects are not distinctly specified; together with the time and place at which they have existed; and all the material circumstances by which they were accompanied.* All these ought also to be communicated to the person accused a sufficient time before the trial, to give him a full opportunity for preparing his defence.

When a trespasser has been excommunicated, *every proper inducement should be holden out to him to return by repentance and reformation.* For this end, the minister, and other persons of weight in the church, should take every proper and promising occasion to give him their best counsels and exhortations. As this ought to do for a heathen and a publican, it will I presume be acknowledged to be due to *him.*

Formerly, excommunication was accompanied by many expressions of a spirit not more hostile to the trespasser than to Christianity. The object of it was cursed in form, and solemnly consigned to perdition. Happily for us, no severities even of form exist in this sentence here, beside those which are plainly authorized by the Scriptures.

III. *The ends for which Christian discipline was instituted are the following.*

1. *The* AMENDMENT *of those who transgress.*

For this end every part of ecclesiastical discipline is calculated as if it had no other object. The attention paid to it is however perfectly justified by its importance. This is no less than the reformation of a lapsed Christian brother. His peace; his Christian character; his worthy participation of Christian privileges; his recovery of the divine approbation: his future usefulness in the present life; the measure of his happiness in the life to come; and even his salvation itself; are all deeply concerned, and oftentimes absolutely involved in these administrations. That these objects are at times accomplished by private

remonstrance and public admonition, will probably not be doubted. With equal certainty are they accomplished by excommunication. This is directly declared by St. Paul, 1 Cor. v. 4, 5. *In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, being gathered together,* in better language, *Being gathered together in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and of my Spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, I command you to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.*

2. *Another end of this discipline is, the purification of the church from unworthy members.*

Tares, we know, *are sown* in this world; and will *grow together with the wheat until the harvest.* So long as they are undistinguishable from the wheat, it is unlawful for us to eradicate them, *lest we root up the wheat also;* but when they are clearly discovered in the field of Christ, they are to be removed. The rules which are given us for this purpose are perfect, so far as it may be safely intrusted to the prudence of man. As *a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump;* Christians are required to *purge out the old leaven,* that the church may become *a new lump,* pure and unleavened.

3. *Another end of this system is, the preclusion of unworthy members from the church.*

The church is probably kept pure by preventing unworthy members from uniting themselves with it more effectually, than by excluding them after they are united. Wicked men never love Christian discipline; and are often prevented from attempting to become members of the church, by the fears of falling under its censures. To good men it is only a privilege. Faithful subjects of an earthly government regard its wholesome laws with all their penalties, and the just execution of them with all its pains and terrors, as eminent blessings. These laws they so entirely choose to obey; to this administration they intend to be so uniformly subjects; as hardly ever even to think of their severity, and to feel nothing but their beneficial influence. Whatever apprehension they may at times inspire, such men consider them only as a useful motive to a more uniform and faithful obedience.

Indeed, this subject furnishes a beneficial criterion for

the determination of our religious character. If we cordially relish the discipline of Christ's church, and are sincerely desirous to add to other motives those which it furnishes us for diligence, fidelity, and exactness, in the Christian life; there is solid reason to hope, that we love that which is good; and are therefore real followers of the Redeemer. If, on the other hand, we are impatient of this mild and equitable government, and live in a continual and slavish dread of its terrors; there is but too much reason to conclude, that we love the conduct which this system punishes; disrelish the purity which it requires; and of course have made a profession which is unfounded and insincere.

Ecclesiastical discipline, more than all other means, has contributed to preserve whatever purity has been found in the church of Christ; and in a great degree prevented it from being crowded by unworthy members. Christians, therefore, cannot fail to regard their discipline as an invaluable blessing.

4. *The improvement of Christians is another important end of this institution.*

This end has always been promoted, and often in an eminent degree, by a well-directed administration of Christian discipline. From the social nature of man, that which concerns others is instinctively applied to ourselves. From the sins of others, we learn not to sin in the same manner. By their negligence we are warned of our own danger, and induced to watch, and strive, and pray, that we enter not into their temptations. By their repentance and return to their duty, we are forcibly admonished of our own daily necessity of reformation. Perhaps there is scarcely a more edifying sight, than a lapsed Christian ingenuously confessing his sin, acknowledging the justice of his punishment, imploring the forgiveness of God, and a reunion to the family of Christ, and recommencing the Christian life with new amiableness and beauty. Nothing in this world more resembles the joy of angels over a repenting sinner, than the emotions excited in the minds of good men by this solemn transaction.

5. *Another end of this institution is, to keep the character of the church unblemished in the eye of mankind.*

On the character of the church, as it appears to the eyes of the world, depends in a great degree the character of religion itself. In a former discourse, I have shewn how much more real and impressive religion seems to the minds of sinners, when beheld in the life of a person who *adorns the doctrine of God our Saviour*, than when seen only with the eye of speculation. The exemplary and unblamable conduct of a church is proportionally a more convincing and a more persuasive source of these impressions. When the church is *fair as the moon, and beautiful as Tirzah:* she is also *terrible as an army with banners.* Genuine virtue is an awful object of sinful men. In vain do they labour to shake off their reverence and their dread of this object. It is settled in their minds by the unalterable constitution of God: and is irresistibly forced upon them by their consciences, whenever the object is brought before their eyes. Nothing but furious passion or absolute profligacy will prevent any man from entertaining these views. But they are not necessary views only. They are also eminently profitable; as was, I presume, satisfactorily shewn in that discourse. He who is at a loss concerning this truth, may easily satisfy himself by observing what experience abundantly testifies, that wherever churches either pervert or abandon the discipline instituted by Christ, they themselves become lax, *lukewarm*, and possessed only of *a name to live;* and that religion around them hastens towards a final extinction. Wherever this discipline is scripturally maintained; churches are adorned with the beauty of holiness; and religion, usually at least, flourishes among those who are without.

IV. *My own views concerning the persons by whom discipline is to be administered,* will be sufficiently communicated in the following observations.

1. *The persons who are to administer private remonstrance are plainly pointed out in the text.*

Concerning these therefore there can be no debate. Not a little doubt however has arisen, in this country at least, concerning the cases in which *such remonstrance is a necessary commencement of ecclesiastical discipline.* A mul-

titude of Christians in our own country have supposed, that the steps mentioned in the former part of this discourse are indispensable *in every case of transgression*, whether public or private. Others have believed, that as the case mentioned in the text is a private case merely, and as the discipline involved in it seems applicable to such a case only, it is not to be employed when the transgression is public. The latter of these opinions is in my view just. In the nature of the case, a public transgression plainly demands no private interference. *Them that sin*, says St. Paul to Timothy, *rebuke before all; that others also may fear*, 1 Tim. v. 20. *A man that is a heretic*, says the same apostle to Titus, *after a first and second admonition, reject*, Tit. iii. 10. By *them that sin*, I understand the apostle to mean, *them that sin publicly;* and suppose St. Paul here to direct a public admonition as the immediate and proper act of discipline for such a transgression. A heretic is *a sower of divisions*, or *the leader of a faction in the church.* Such a person Titus was commanded to reject after a first and second admonition; both plainly public; since they were to be both administered by Titus himself, in the character and office of a minister. This is evident also from the reason subjoined in the following verse. *Knowing that he who is such is subverted and sinneth, being condemned of himself.* In other words, Because thou knowest that such a person is subverted or overturned; and is certainly guilty of sin: being proved to be a sinner, by the known fact that he makes divisions in the church, or heads a party against its peace. It is here however to be observed, that *two public admonitions* are here required to be given to the heretic before his excommunication. As there is no difference between heretics and other public sinners, I should regard this as the proper rule of proceeding in all cases of discipline which were not commenced with private admonition.

But in this country there is such a univeral persuasion, that private remonstrance is indispensable, even where a transgression has been public, as to make it, in my view, expedient to commence the process of discipline in this manner, in most, if not all, instances. The minds of Christians generally are here fully possessed of a conviction, that

this is a right established by the Scriptures; and, whenever it is omitted, feel as if all that was right had not been done. Excommunicated persons therefore feel satisfied in every such case, that the judgment of the Christian community is so far on their side, and against the proceedings of the church. This also will ordinarily be the opinion of a considerable part of its members. Hence the censure will be stripped of much of its proper power. The man who is censured, will feel himself to be still in a state of controversy with the church; and will therefore be little inclined to reformation or repentance. The church will feel itself weakened; and all its enemies will manifest their hostility by clamouring against its injustice. For these reasons, prudence appears plainly to demand the adoption of private remonstrance as the means of avoiding these evils.

As the administration of this remonstrance will, in such a case, be a duty incumbent alike on all the members of the church; it will be asked, By whom shall this duty be performed? The answer to this question must be given differently, according to the different constitutions of churches. *In our own*, it ought unquestionably to be performed by persons commissioned by the church. No others will be considered as acting in the case with unquestionable propriety.

2. *Admonition and excommunication are to be administered by the pastor, or, when there is no pastor, by the moderator of the church, in conformity to a vote of the church.*

Wherever a church is vacant, it will always be expedient that a neighbouring minister should be requested to perform this office.

That these sentences should be the result of a vote of the church, and executed under their authority, is to me completely evident from the Scriptures. This I do not gather from the text; nor from the meaning of the word *church*; which, I am well aware, is very various. At the time when the precepts in the text were delivered, the Christian church was not organized. It may therefore be difficult to settle precisely the sense in which our Saviour used the term on this occasion; or to make any satisfactory application of it to the case in hand. On the text therefore I shall not insist.

There is in the Scriptures a single case of discipline recited, and, so far as I know, but one in which the administration was committed wholly to uninspired hands; or, perhaps in better terms, to persons not extraordinarily commissioned to direct ecclesiastical concerns. This is *the case of the incestuous person in the church at Corinth.* St. Paul, in 1 Cor. v. directs the members of that church to assemble together for the purpose of excommunicating this person in the name of Christ. The church accordingly assembled, and excommunicated the man, as we are informed in the second chapter of the Second Epistle. In the sixth verse of this chapter St. Paul says, *Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many;* υπω των πλειονων; literally, *by the majority;* that is, by the majority of the Corinthian church; the persons addressed in this chapter, and throughout these Epistles.

Should it be said, that *this sentence was directed by St. Paul;* I acknowledge it. But the execution of it was committed to the Corinthian church as a body; and it was accordingly executed by their vote and ecclesiastical authority. There was here no need of a formal trial. The question concerning the guilt of the man was already settled by abundant evidence. The apostle therefore only taught the Corinthian church their duty in such a case; and required them to perform it. Had he meant to exercise his apostolical authority in a judicial manner; he would have excommunicated the incestuous person by a sentence of his own; as he excommunicated Hymenæus and Alexander; and not have left him to a sentence of the Corinthian church. This is farther illustrated by the fact, that St. Paul *beseeches,* not *commands,* the Corinthians to restore this excommunicated man: verse 8, *Wherefore I beseech you, that ye would confirm your love towards him.* This request plainly teaches us, that, in the view of the apostle, the Corinthian church were possessed of the power by which this restoration was to be accomplished.

What it was proper for the Corinthian church to do in this case, is unquestionably proper to be done by every other church in a similar case. As this is the only scriptural example in which a sentence of excommunication was passed by men not extraordinarily commissioned; it is, I appre-

hend, a decisive rule of proceeding to all other churches. The peculiar conduct of apostles, and other extraordinarily commissioned persons, must in most cases be very imperfectly applicable as a rule for *us*. It will be impossible, I apprehend, to shew, that the powers sometimes necessarily vested in these men have descended to any men who are now living. My own opinions concerning *bishops*, in the prelatical sense, have been given in preceding discourses. *Ruling elders are, in my apprehension, scriptural officers of the Christian church;* and I cannot but think our defection with respect to these officers, from the practice of the first settlers of New-England, an error in ecclesiastical government. But the present occasion will not permit an exhibition of my views concerning this subject at large.

There are many cases in which individuals are dissatisfied, on reasonable grounds, with the judgment of the church. It is perfectly obvious, that in a debate between two members of the same church, the parties may in many respects stand on unequal ground. One of them may be ignorant; without family connexions; in humble circumstances; and possessed of little or no personal influence. The other may be a person of distinction; opulent; powerfully connected; of superior understanding; and of great personal influence, not only in the church, but also in the country at large. As things are in this world, it is impossible that these persons should possess, in any controversy between them, equal advantages. Beyond all this, the church itself may be one party, and a poor and powerless member the other. In this case also, it is unnecessary to observe, the individual must labour under every supposable disadvantage to which a righteous cause can be subjected. To bring the parties in these or any similar circumstances as near to a state of equality as human affairs will permit, it seems absolutely necessary that *every ecclesiastical body should have its tribunal of appeals;* a superior judicature, established by common consent, and vested with authority to issue finally all those causes which, before a single church, are obviously liable to a partial decision.

Such a tribunal in all the New-England states except this is formed by what is styled *a select council*, that is, a council mutually chosen by the contending parties. This

has long appeared to me a judicatory most happily constituted. The parties choose of course such persons as they suppose most likely to favour themselves. If therefore they commit no mistakes in the choice, the council may be considered as divided in opinion before it assembles; and as furnishing every reason to believe, that it will not be less divided afterward. Its proceedings will frequently be marked with strong partialities; and its decisions, if made at all, will not unfrequently be those of a bare majority. Coming from different parts of the country, it will have no common rules of proceeding. After its decisions, its existence ceases. Its responsibility vanishes with its existence; as does also the sense of its authority. As the members frequently come from a distance, it can have no knowledge concerning those numerous particulars which respect the transactions to be judged of; and the characters, interests, views, and contrivances, of those who are immediately concerned. As individuals, these members may in some instances have much weight; and in certain circumstances may, by their wisdom and piety, do much good. But all this must arise solely from their personal character. As a council, as a judicatory, they can have scarcely any weight at all; for, as they disappear when the trial is ended, they are forgotten in their united character; and, having no permanent existence, are regarded with no habitual respect, and even with no prejudice in their favour. Very often also, as they were chosen on partial principles, they are led of course to partial decisions; and leave behind them very unhappy opinions concerning ecclesiastical government at large.

In this state, a much happier mode has been resorted to for the accomplishment of this subject. The tribunal of appeal is here *a consociation;* a standing body composed of the settled ministers within an associational district, and delegates from the churches in the same district: a body always existing, of acknowledged authority; of great weight; possessed of all the impartiality incident to human affairs; feeling its responsibility as a thing of course; a court of record, having a regular system of precedents; and from being frequently called to business of this nature, skilled to a good degree in the proper modes of proceeding.

The greatest defect in this system, as it seems to me, is *the*

want of a still superior tribunal to receive appeals in cases where they are obviously necessary. These it is unnecessary for me to particularize. Every person extensively acquainted with ecclesiastical affairs knows that such cases exist. The only remedy provided by the system of discipline established in this state for those who feel aggrieved by a constitutional judgment, is, *to introduce a neighbouring consociation as assessors with that which has given the judgment at a new hearing of the cause.* The provision of this partial, imperfect tribunal of appeals, is a clear proof that those who formed the system, perceived the absolute necessity of some appellate jurisdiction. The judicatory which they have furnished of this nature, is perhaps the best which the churches of the state would at that or any succeeding period have consented to establish. Ye it is easy to see that, were they disposed, they might easily institute one which would be incomparably better.

The only instance found in the Scriptures of an appeal actually made for the decision of an ecclesiastical debate, is that recorded in the fifteenth chapter of the Acts, and mentioned for another purpose in a former discourse. A number of the Jews in the church at Antioch insisted, that the Gentile converts should be circumcised, and be obliged to keep the law of Moses. Paul and Barnabas strenuously controverted this point with them. As no harmonious termination of the debate could be had at Antioch, an appeal was made to the apostles and elders at Jerusalem. But, as I observed in the discourse mentioned, *it was heard and determined by the apostles, elders, and brethren.* As this judicatory was formed under the direction of the apostles themselves, it must be admitted as a precedent for succeeding churches; and teaches us on the one hand, that an appellate jurisdiction is both lawful and necessary in the church, and on the other, that it is to be composed of both ministers and brethren, necessarily acting at the present time by delegation.

REMARKS.

From this account of Christian discipline it is evident,

1. *That it was intended for churches consisting of Christians.*

As this subject was discussed at some length in the sermon concerning the character of church-members as exhibited in the Scriptures, I shall dismiss it here without any farther observations.

2. *That it is a system wisely adapted to promote the prosperity of such churches.*

All the ends of this discipline are such as Christians can comprehend and feel; while the means are most happily fitted to accomplish them. Private remonstrance is most wisely calculated to benefit the trespassing brother; to awaken in him a sense of guilt, danger, and the necessity of repentance and reformation; to preserve his Christian character; and to restore him before he shall be known by others to have fallen. Of the same tendency is the additional remonstrance by the accompanying brethren, and the subsequent admonition by the church. Of these just and gentle proceedings, the final sentence of excommunication is a proper close; and is perfectly fitted to reform an obstinate brother. He who will not be won by the mild measures of tenderness, will never feel either his character or condition but by dint of distress. Should he continue obstinate in this situation, the church will be freed from a spot on its reputation, an obstacle to its communion, and a nuisance to the religion which it professes. At the same time, the spirit with which every part of this discipline is to be administered, and without which it exists in form only, precludes every reasonable fear of haste, injustice, or severity.

The manner also in which the proper evidence of the offender's disposition is to be obtained, and the prohibition of any farther proceeding where it is unattainable, are strong marks of that wisdom in the Lawgiver by which it was devised. The same wisdom is conspicuous in the repetition of the several steps of the proceeding, and the protraction of the process in this manner, for a considerable length of time. The most desirable opportunity is here furnished to the offender for consideration and amendment; and to the church, for coolness in its inquiries, and justice in its decisions. All the parts of the process are also obvious to a very moderate capacity; such as are easily understood by plain men; and

easily applied, whether they are to judge or to be judged. On the whole, it may be justly observed, that no system of judicial proceedings is so happily calculated to accomplish in the most efficacious manner the purposes for which it is instituted. Eminently profitable and indispensably necessary to the Christian church, it is at the same time an illustrious display of wisdom, goodness, and providential care, in its divine Founder.

SERMON CLXIII.

DEATH.

Thou turnest man to destruction, and sayest, Return, ye children of men.—PSALM XC. 3.

IN this series of discourses I have considered the being and character of God; his creation of the heavens and the earth, of angels and men; the primitive state of man; his fall and condemnation; their influence on the moral character of his posterity; and the impossibility of justification by works. I have examined the character and mediation of Christ; and the justification accomplished by his righteousness. I have endeavoured to exhibit the character of the Holy Spirit; his agency in the work of regeneration; the reality, the necessity, and nature, of that work, together with its antecedents, attendants, consequences, and evidences. I have attempted to explain the divine law, and the principal duties which it requires; together with the foundation, the nature, and the effects, of virtue, the true and only obedience to it; and the nature of that inability to obey it, which is an important characteristic of man; and the means of our restoration to obedience. I have also investigated the means of obtaining, and the means of increasing, grace; the manner in which, and the persons by whom, they are to be employed. In the course of this investiga-

tion, I have endeavoured to explain the constitution of the Christian church; the character and duties of its members and officers; the nature of its sacraments; and the scheme of its discipline.

In the progress of these discourses, I have also stated and endeavoured to obviate the principal objections usually brought against that system of theology which I believe to be revealed in the Scriptures.

Thus have I gone through the consideration of the great articles contained in the spiritual providence of God as disclosed in the gospel; and conducted man through life to the last act of that providence with which he is concerned in the present world; the act by which he is removed into eternity.

This great and gloomy event is in the text ascribed directly to the providence of God; and exhibited not as the result of a natural and necessary decay, nor of a general tendency of things, but of his sovereign pleasure. *Thou turnest man to destruction, and sayest, Return, ye children of men. Thou art the agent in bringing man to death and the grave; and by thy command returnest him to his original dust.* All the natural causes of death therefore are only modes and means of its accomplishment by the hand of God.

A multitude of considerations necessarily strike the mind of him who makes this subject the theme of his serious attention. Of this number are,

Its universality;

Its extension through the ages of time;

Its certainty;

Its uncertainty with regard to the time, manner, and circumstances;

The causes by which it is brought to pass; and,

The impossibility of escaping or resisting it; together with many other things deeply solemn, and capable of being eminently useful to mankind.

But it is my design to consider death, on this occasion, *merely as a part of the great system of providential dispensations towards the children of men;* as the event by which they are removed out of their present state of being; as the close of their probation, and their introduction to eternity.

'It is manifest, that some removal from this world is a necessary part of such a system. A probation involves in its nature a close. It infers a trial at that close, by which the character of the man who has gone through the probation shall be finally settled, as good or evil, as acquitted or condemned. It supposes also a reward suited to his conduct, and intended to recompense it with absolute propriety.

This close, so far as we can understand the subject, must be either painful or pleasant, disgraceful or honourable, according to the conduct of the persons concerned. If their conduct be supposed to have been virtuous, obedient, and pleasing to God; the end of their trial we should naturally expect to be pleasing and honourable; and a proof of his approbation of their character. If their conduct be supposed to have been evil, and displeasing to God; a painful and disgraceful termination of this state of their existence would be rationally expected. The views which he formed of their conduct, we should naturally expect him to express at their removal from the world.

In this world good men are continually surrounded by spiritual enemies, or enemies to their virtue and final welfare. These enemies, it is to be supposed, will on every occasion attempt to lessen their happiness, and increase their sufferings. The close of life furnishes the last opportunity for this purpose. This period therefore these enemies must be expected to seize with eagerness, in order to annoy them so far as they are permitted.

The best of men also have sinned often and greatly; and have thus merited great evils at the hand of God. Hence, with the strictest propriety, they may suffer greatly at this as well as at other seasons. No reason can be assigned, why their enemies may not be permitted to disturb them therefore in the article of death.

Their own minds also may, for important purposes, be left at this time to the distresses arising from the remembrance of their former sins, and from perplexing thoughts concerning their spiritual condition. Hence various doubts may arise, and anxieties be multiplied. *The terrors of death may encompass them, and the pains of hell, of sheol, or* ἅδης, that is, in plainer language, the fears of what will befal them

in the world of departed spirits, may *lay hold on them.* Especially will all this seem easy of apprehension, if we remember, that these things may, and will, be in the end benefits to them, through the agency of him who is able to bring good out of evil. In this manner may the distresses, sometimes suffered by good men at death, be sufficiently explained.

Wicked men, on the contrary, are often totally careless concerning all moral and religious subjects, unconcerned about their present or future condition, and indifferent alike to the favour and the frowns of their Maker. This heedless spirit they sometimes carry with them to a dying-bed; and, under its influence, are equally stupid, as in the preceding periods of life. On this account it is to be expected, that such men should, at times, *have no bands in their death.* Disease also often weakens their capacity of thinking; and prevents them from coming to any just conclusions concerning their past conduct, their present state, and their future allotments. Frequently too they labour to make a virtue of necessity, to resign themselves quietly to the death which they see they cannot avoid, and to submit to that God whom they now feel themselves unable to resist. This they frequently mistake for Christian resignation; and although totally unlike it in every important characteristic; and, under the influence of this mistake, sometimes leave the world with a degree of composure.

Nor is it unreasonable to believe, that these things are the result of a judicial dispensation of God. We know that he has given up men judicially to *strong delusion, that they should believe a lie.* In what case can such a dispensation be supposed with more propriety, than in that of gross, long-continued, and obstinate, sin perpetrated by a heart hardening itself in iniquity through life. Such a heart certainly may with propriety be permitted to deceive itself, at any time during its probation: and this deception may, for aught that appears, be enhanced by its external enemies. Evil men often deceive, and flatter with false hopes, their dying companions. No reason can be given, why the same mischievous office may not be performed by other evil beings.

To these things it ought to be added, that such men have

in several instances died in alarm and horror; when, from the pains taken to conceal the circumstances of their death, they may have been supposed to leave the world in peace. There is a general disposition in mankind to think and speak favourably of the dying and the dead. In this solemn case even personal hatred is apt to give way to compassion; and every prejudice to be lost in concern for him who now ceases to be either our enemy or our rival. Often also we speak favourably of deceased persons from compunctions of conscience; from a desire to be thought candid and kind; because they were our relations or friends; or because they were of the same party or sect with ourselves. Frequently we make the case our own; wishing, and under the influence of our wishes believing, that *their* exit may be hopeful and safe, because *we* are of a similar character, and may in this case die hopefully also. Infidels particularly have often taken great pains to persuade the world, that their fellow-infidels died with serenity; and, when their last moments have been embittered by remorse and terror, have concealed this fact with every ingenious and laborious effort. No man can mistake the reason of this conduct. The acknowledgment, that these persons died in fear and anguish, would convince every man, that they doubted of the doctrines which they professed to believe; and were afraid that the Scriptures were still of divine origin, and that thus infidelity would receive a wound which could not be healed Several instances of this nature have been disclosed to the world; and have furnished strong reasons to believe, that, if the whole truth were discovered, many more would be found.

These considerations, taken together, prove beyond debate, that the serenity, whether assumed or pretended, with which wicked men are supposed to die, is false and hollow; on the one hand, the mere result of ignorance or stupidity; on the other a veil, employed to cover, either from themselves or their fellow-men, the real state of their minds at death. From this source therefore no good can be augured for them; and no support warrantably gained by their impenitent survivors.

With these things premised I observe,

1. *That death is accomplished by the hand of God.*

Thou turnest man to destruction, and sayest, Return, ye children of men. Thus it was threatened to our first parents and to their posterity. It was threatened and executed as the reward of sin. Its universal execution is therefore a decisive proof of the universality of sin.

II. *Death is a direct and strong expression of the views which God entertains concerning the character of man.*

This remarkable event is a part of the providence of God, and the result of an immediate act of him alone; a fact in which his hand is seen, and his pleasure expressed. It is therefore a direct expression of the views which he forms of the human character. That we should leave the world in some manner or other, may not unnaturally be regarded as a necessary event in the providential system; necessary, not for its own sake, but for the sake of other events, to the existence of which it is indispensable. In this view, it may be considered as no testimony of the approbation or disapprobation of God. In this view, death may be considered merely as an expression of the divine pleasure concerning something beyond the present world; some future purpose, to which our removal is a necessary introduction. But the manner in which we are actually removed, the circumstances which now attend our departure, are plainly unnecessary to the removal itself, and to any allotments which are destined to us beyond the grave.

Were all mankind to leave this world, as Enoch and Elijah left it; or were they without pain or sorrow to drop these corruptible bodies, and be invested with those which are incorruptible, immortal, and glorious; their exit would be justly considered as a most happy omen that they were destined to a future state of favour and enjoyment. All men would say with unanswerable force, that these splendid and auspicious circumstances were indubitable proofs of the divine pleasure; proofs that God regarded us with kindness only, and intended that we should be only prosperous in the coming world. In the same manner, and with the same evidence, we are compelled to conclude, that the gloomy, distressing circumstances with which we are conveyed out

of time into eternity, exhibit the anger of God against our race; and forebode a melancholy reception in the world whither we go. The long-continued decays, and the violent diseases, with which our removal is accomplished; the wasted strength, the corrupted frame, the livid aspect, the enfeebled understanding, which precede our dissolution; the struggles, the convulsions, the fears, the agonies, with which we give up the ghost; are certainly, to the eye of just consideration, strong intimations of the manner in which God regards our conduct here, and of the treatment which we are to expect from him hereafter. So far as his designs can be learned from this dispensation, no such reception can be expected from him as will support a trembling mind just ready to enter the regions of future being. On the contrary, *a fearful looking-for of judgment and fiery indignation* must naturally alarm every child of Adam, while bidding adieu to the place of his probation.

It is not here intended, that death, in any form or circumstances, is an expression of the views which God entertains concerning *a given individual*. It may be true; it undoubtedly is; that death in some instances is so conducted by the providence of God, as to exhibit the manner in which *individuals* are regarded by him. There is a peace in death on the one hand, and a horror on the other, sometimes existing, which, *when taken in connexion with the preceding life*, may be fairly considered as disclosing the favour or the anger of God. But the observations just now made respect death merely as a general dispensation to mankind; as an expression of the views which God forms of our common nature. With this reference the doctrine here urged will be seen to be just, as well as highly important. He who duly considers it will easily discern, that if he would form rational hopes of future good, he must found them on something entirely different from the natural character or the usual conduct of man.

Should it be objected, that death is only a necessity of our nature (as ancient philosophers chose to consider it), and that therefore no conclusion can be drawn from it; I answer, that our nature itself is not necessary; but might have been changed, with infinite ease, by the mere pleasure of God. I answer also, that none of the actual circum-

stances of death are at all necessary, any farther than that his pleasure has made them so; for with infinite ease he could remove all men from this world as he removed Enoch and Elijah.

III. *Death arrests mankind at every age of life.*

This is undoubtedly one of the most mysterious dispensations of Providence with which we are acquainted. God, we certainly know, does nothing without a sufficient reason. But we can allege, we can devise, no reason why children should be created, and close their eyes in death at the very moment, when they first open them upon the light of the living. The agonies of the cradle, agonies suffered by a being incapable of having done good or evil, are wholly inexplicable by man; and leave the serious inquirer in a state of absolute suspense and perplexity. This perplexity is rendered still more distressing, when we reflect on the apparent usefulness of their existence here, both to themselves and others; and the apparent want of any sufficient end for which they were created. It is not intended, that no apparent end of their being exists; but that none satisfactory to the human mind is visible in the circumstances which attend them. The very mysteriousness of the fact is one useful thing; and will contribute to persuade us, that we ought readily to believe other mysteries which are of great importance. He who admits the providence of God, and acknowledges wisdom and goodness to be the source of it all, will see in this event abundant reason to determine, that the mysteries of the gospel are no objection to its truth or revelation. Mysteries are no more an objection against the gospel, as a work of God, than against creation and providence as works of the same great Being. That the dispensation in question is a work of God cannot be doubted. That a revelation from him should resemble his other works, and be mysterious in some such manner as they are mysterious, ought to be presupposed. All the works of the same Being ought certainly to be expected to sustain the same general character, and all the works of an infinite being must, especially as they are formed for purposes boundless in their nature and extent, be incomprehensible by us, who *are of yesterday, and know* comparatively *no-*

thing. Our proper business is therefore to trust where we cannot know; and in both cases humbly and devoutly to adore.

IV. *Death terminates the probation of man.*

That death ends our probation, so far as this world is concerned, I shall not be expected to prove. That there is no probation beyond the grave is evident from the fact, that such a state is never mentioned in the Scriptures. Every thing which is said in them concerning futurity, exhibits it only as a state of reward. To this object they conduct us, and then close their communications.

But this is not all, nor even the chief proof of the doctrine. In Eccl. ix. 10 we are informed, that *there is no work, device, knowledge, nor wisdom, in the world of departed spirits whither we go.* The work here mentioned is plainly the work of salvation; and this it is declared cannot be done. Hence Solomon exhorts us to *do* this work *with our might* while we are in the present world.

In Acts iii. 21 St. Peter says concerning Christ, *whom the heaven must receive, until the times of the restitution of all things.* But Christ, we are elsewhere informed, will come a second time to judgment. At this time then all things will be restored which will ever be restored. The present *heavens and earth will then pass away,* and be succeeded by *new heavens and a new earth,* in which *righteousness will dwell* for ever. But we are abundantly assured, that at this period, the everlasting rewards of the righteous and the wicked will commence. There will therefore be no future probation.

In John ix. 4 our Saviour says, *The night cometh, in which no man can work:* that is, the season of which death is the beginning, and eternity the continuance. All the probationary work of man therefore is ended when death arrives; and will never be resumed.

V. *Death ends the enjoyments of the impenitent.*

Son, says Abraham to the rich man, *remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things.* This was said to a man in the future world immediately after his death; and said by a glorified spirit. It was said to a man hum-

bly and earnestly asking for *a drop of water* only; the least good of which we can form a conception. It is alleged also as a reason why he must not expect even this little good. What is this reason? It is, that he had *received all his good things* on this side of the grave. The list of his good things was therefore completed.

Of these enjoyments, some such men have more, and some less. All however have very few, compared with the necessities of a rational and immortal mind; although each has many, when compared with what he deserves. But whether they be few or many, they all exist in the present world only. Beyond the grave, every such man will find eternity destitute of all good to himself.

VI. *Death terminates the sufferings of the righteous.*

And likewise, says Abraham to the rich man, *and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted.* When Lazarus finished his earthly existence; he bade adieu to his last sorrows. All that now remained for him was comfort. The prospect before him was only bright and glorious; the unclouded morning of eternal day. God now began to *wipe away all tears from his eyes; and the Lamb to feed him, and to lead him to living fountains of water.*

Good men in this world, although never punished according to their desert, suffer in many instances long and severely. Sometimes they *have trial of cruel mockings and scourgings,* sometimes of *bonds and imprisonment.* They have been *stoned, sawn asunder, tempted, and slain with the sword. They* have *wandered about in sheep-skins, and goat-skins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented;* and have been compelled to find a refuge *in deserts, in mountains, in dens, and in caves of the earth.* Even where these dreadful evils of persecution have not been undergone, they have still encountered severe distresses from sickness, pain, poverty, bereavements, melancholy, desertion, and many other calamities incident to our unhappy state. How delightful must be the remembrance to every such sufferer, that these distresses constitute his whole portion of woe. Few things can more effectually contribute to prevent him from *fainting when he is rebuked,* or persuade him to *run with patience the race which is set before him.* Let every Christian then

bow submissively to the *chastisement* of his heavenly Father; and sustain himself under every trouble with the full assurance, that his sorrows will soon have passed away for ever.

VII. *The termination of human life is wisely appointed by God.*

Life is long enough for the sinner and for the saint. Seventy years are a sufficient period to try the character. Were the sinner to continue longer in the world, he would still be equally hopeless, and more guilty. Habits of wickedness, strengthened through so long a period, admit neither of removal nor of hope. Whither shall we go, to find penitence after this period is passed? The antediluvian world was immensely more wicked than the present; because men lived a thousand years. Their plans of sin were vastly more extensive; their sagacity in pursuing them greatly superior; their opportunities amazingly more numerous; and their hopes of success beyond comparison better founded. In this manner their evil habits became fixed beyond recall; while death was at such a distance as to make the present life seem not a little like an eternal duration. What existed then would in the like circumstances exist now. Were human life to be equally protracted, mankind would soon become as profligate as they were before the deluge.

That the present life is a sufficient period of probationary existence to the righteous, will be readily acknowledged by all men. Every person of this character secures within this period an everlasting inheritance beyond the grave. This is the end for which we live; the only end of real importance. When this end therefore is secured, no good reason can be given for protracting the date of the present life. It cannot be alleged, that the sufferings of it are so few and small, or the blessings so numerous and great, as to render it desirable to those who have become entitled to the heavenly happiness, to lengthen out a weary pilgrimage in the present world. It is no uncommon thing for the righteous themselves to be desirous, with St. Paul, *to depart*, that they may *be with Christ* in a future and better world; and this notwithstanding all the gloom and terror with which

death is arrayed. Plainly therefore the present period of human life is well suited to the circumstances of both saints and sinners; and wisely appointed by God.

From these considerations concerning this solemn subject I derive the following

REMARKS.

1. *It is manifest, that in the circumstances of our departure from this world, there is much room for misjudging concerning the character of those who die.*

There are I acknowledge instances, in which we may estimate this character with a high degree of probability. There are instances in which wicked men strongly exhibit both their wickedness, and their awful apprehensions of an approaching retribution; so strongly and so decisively as to forbid every rational hope, that *it will be well with them* in a future world. There are other instances, in which their stupidity is so entire, and their presumption so gross, as to create necessarily the most unfavourable apprehensions concerning them. There are cases, on the contrary, in which the views of good men are so clear and just, their sentiments so fraught with the spirit of the gospel, and their hopes so bright, rational, and evangelical, as to leave no painful doubt concerning their future destiny. All this however is to be considered in a direct and intimate connexion with the preceding lives of the persons in question.

But there are also many more cases, with respect to both classes of men, in which a determination, such as would be satisfactory to a candid mind, is, by the circumstances on which it must be founded, rendered plainly impossible. Sinners, I mean such as possess the character of impenitents throughout their lives, are, it is to be remembered, often as amiable by nature as any of those who become Christians. They are often as religiously educated; are trained to habits equally desirable; and possess, to the eye of the world, characters as unimpeachable, and even more agreeable, than many persons who ultimately become penitents. The grace of God descends not unfrequently upon men of originally harsh, violent, rugged, sordid, proud, or unfeeling tempers; upon men, erroneously, grossly, narrowly, or not at all, educated; upon men, long habituated to

many sins; upon men rendered unamiable by an unresisted, pertinacious, and rivetted indulgence of these odious dispositions. On the other hand, there is no reason to believe, that the young ruler who came to Christ to inquire *what good thing he should do that he might have eternal life*, was sanctified; although we are informed, that Jesus, *beholding him, loved him*. As little reason is there to believe, that many others of our race, possessing a character equally amiable both by nature and habit, are ever renewed by the Spirit of God. Persons of the former class also carry through life, notwithstanding their renovation, notwithstanding the real and important moral change, made in them by this event, not a little of their original unamiable spirit. Their remaining sinfulness will often shew itself in an unpromising as well as unhappy manner. Candid and charitable persons, who live by their side, will indeed see many appearances of piety, mingled at times with the operations of this untoward character. But the world at large will discern very few; and persons peculiarly prejudiced will perceive none. When therefore such men leave the world, it is plain, that if they should leave it full of hope, and even of exultation, all those who believed nothing concerning their sanctification, and remembered only the unamiable parts of their character, would now regard their hope and exultation as unwarranted by the gospel, and founded only in delusion. Equally evident is it, that those who with less prejudice saw them only at a distance, and marked only the prominent and perhaps the disagreeable parts of their conduct, would entertain many doubts and very limited hopes, concerning their present character or future welfare. Those Christians, who were intimately connected with them, knowing them better, would indeed judge more favourably. But this judgment would by others be regarded as the result of mere prejudice, and the blind spirit of party.

Those of the latter class would, on the other hand, be regarded with affection and complacency. All their commendable actions, which it is to be recollected are usually very pleasing to mankind, because they are chiefly intended to give them pleasure, would now be remembered with peculiar advantage to their character. The prejudice

in favour of the dead would operate peculiarly in *their* favour. The hope of our own final safety, founded on the belief that *they* were safe, and that *we* were like them, would render us eager to conclude well concerning them. The wish of all around us, that their future state might be happy, and the silence of all concerning every thing which might unsettle this favourable opinion, would give it increased, and often irresistible strength. Thus, when to the judgment of strict scrutiny, the case might seem at the best doubtful and distressing, it would be regarded with high hopes and abundant consolation: since no such scrutiny would be employed.

At the same time it is ever to be remembered, as I have shewn at large in a preceding discourse, that the scriptural evidences of piety are often not without great difficulty applied to the state of our own minds. Hence multitudes of good men probably experience many doubts and difficulties throughout their lives. Christians, who are modest, timid, and easily apprehensive, will therefore naturally and often conclude against themselves. Bold and rash men, on the contrary, nay, even such as are easy and quiet, and always prone to hope well, will at least as often and as naturally conclude in their own favour. An extensive knowledge of sin, and a watchful observation on the part of him who possesses such knowledge of the sins committed by himself, can hardly fail of producing many anxieties on a dying bed. Ignorance and inattention concerning this interesting subject, will to a great extent have the contrary effect.

From these considerations, and others of a similar nature which cannot now be mentioned, it is evident that this subject must be attended often with great uncertainty; and in very many cases cannot be judged of without extreme danger of error. The reason why it has been here discussed, is a wish to prevent those unfounded and dangerous hopes, and those unnecessary and causeless fears, which bad men on the one hand and good men on the other, derive from very doubtful appearances attendant on the deaths of others. Let it be remembered, that the Scriptures have no where made the circumstances of our decease proofs of our moral character. These they have taught us to look for in the

life. *Every tree,* saith our Saviour, *is known by its fruits.* He who has lived a life of piety, he who has actually exercised piety while he lived, will find, however anxious may be his last moments, ample consolation in the future world. He who has not, however peaceful may be his death, will fail of happiness beyond the grave.

2. *These observations teach us the immense importance of obtaining the favour of God in the present life.*

There is no more affecting proof, that we are altogether in the hands of God, and are entirely disposed of according to his pleasure, than that which is seen in our death. He who removes us from this world can plainly remove us to any place, and dispose of us in any manner, which he chooses. Dreadful would it be beyond expression, should he make us die for ever, and throughout our future existence make every succeeding death more distressing than that which went before it. Dreadful would it be, should he make all our future being a state of unceasing death, both to the body and the soul. With what force and propriety has our Saviour required us, *to fear him who is able to destroy both the soul and the body in hell!*

As this life is the only time of probation to man, the present is the only period in which this mighty evil can be prevented. Seize therefore this golden season; and while it lasts, *work out your salvation with fear and trembling.* Think what it will be to die for ever. Remember how short life is; how uncertain; by how frail a tenure possessed; and how apt to vanish before we are aware. Feel, that in this short period, if ever, your salvation is to be secured. Remember, that to all the impeninent, the first death comes too soon, and is always a dreadful introduction to a second infinitely more dreadful. If the first death is terrible to you and to all men; think what it must be to endure these terrors in endless repetition. Soon, I beseech you, call to mind how soon the sun of the longest day goes down. Think how often it is lost in clouds, before it has reached the meridian. Count not upon the evening of life. By him who postpones the business of the day it will never be done. Awake from the fatal slumbers of sloth; from the deceitful hopes of procrastination; from the benumbing torpor of security in sin. Let nothing stand be-

tween you and heaven. What would you not give to purchase this glorious possession? What exchange for it would you receive? How poor must he be, who through this life possessed the world; and throughout his endless existence was in want of all things! How wretched he, who wallowed in pleasure here, and languished out eternity in *lamentation, mourning, and woe!*

3. *How poor a portion is that of the wicked.*

The portion of the wicked is all received and expended during this little life; and is finally terminated by the grave. Its enjoyments are small, they are few, they are mingled with many woes; they are embittered by many disappointments. Many dangers continually betide men of this character; and many fears beset them. Often they are cut off in the beginning, often in the midst of life; and always before they are ready. On a dying bed, they are unable to look back with comfort on any thing which they have done; or forward with hope to any thing which awaits them. Here their enjoyments bid them a final adieu. All their future being is a long and dreary night, with no succeeding day.

4. *With how much wisdom do the righteous choose their portion.*

Godliness, says St. Paul, *is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of the life which is to come.* The nature of the case, and the experience of man, furnish ample proof of the truth of this declaration. A great variety of considerations combine their evidence to prove, that a good man is even in this world happier than a bad one. External enjoyments may indeed be distributed to either indifferently, in greater or less numbers. There are cases also in which either may be peculiarly unhappy. The fair application of the rule is, undoubtedly, to what may be called the average of human life; and if applied to this object, it will be found unquestionably and universally just.

Enjoyments, it is to be remembered, are what the mind finds or makes them. Plain food is delightful to the palate by which it is relished; while the daintiest viands are lost upon a sickly appetite. The spirit of a good man disposes him to consider, and enables him to receive, all his

enjoyments as gifts from the best of all friends; and to exercise continually gratitude to that friend; the most pleasing of all emotions. On this friend also he perpetually relies, as perpetually able and inclined to befriend him; as present wherever he is; as knowing whatever he needs; as exercising towards him everlasting loving kindness; and as having given his own immoveable promise, that *all things shall work together for* his *good.* This train of considerations, regularly attending his whole course of enjoyments, cannot fail to enhance the value of every blessing in which he shares; and to spread warmth, and light, and life, around him in his journey towards heaven.

At the same time he is at peace with himself. He has submitted to God: he has yielded himself to the Redeemer. The war between his inclinations and his conscience, the tumult of his passions and his fears, has in a great measure subsided. To this state of agitation has succeeded the peace of forgiven sin, and an approving conscience. The long night of darkness and storm has retired; and a serene and cheerful morning has arisen upon the world within: a happy presage of perpetual day. A mind at peace with itself is the only mind at ease; and a mind without ease is ill prepared to enjoy. Whatever good the world gives must be imperfectly tasted by him who is unsatisfied with himself, conscious of his exposure to the anger of God, and terrified by expectations of future woe. An exemption from these evils is the first great step towards sincere happiness, and confers a capacity for enjoyment which without it must be for ever unknown. But the present state is far from being a state of enjoyment only. The means of soothing sorrow are at least as necessary to us as those of enhancing comfort. In this important privilege, the superiority of the good man's choice is perhaps still more conspicuous. Peace of mind blunts, in a great measure, all the shafts of adversity. A strong sense of the universal government of God, and of his friendship to the soul, change the very nature of afflictions; and transmute them from curses into blessings. At the same time, the hope of the gospel, always present to the mind of such a man, administers to him the richest consolation in every sorrow; reminds him daily, that in this life only will he be

a sufferer; and directs his eye to that world of approaching peace and prosperity, where his afflictions will finally flee away.

In death itself all these privileges will be his. Hope particularly, and peace, will soothe all the sufferings of a dying bed, and illumine his passage into eternity. Or should he, as is sometimes the case, find fears and sorrows await him at this period; this is his last enemy, and possessed of power over him but for a moment.

Thus the good man goes through the present life, possessed of a happier character, and a happier lot, than any which can be challenged by bad men. His enjoyments are superior in kind, in number, and in degree. He possesses alleviations of trouble to which no bad man can make any pretensions. Death itself is to him often peaceful; and often filled with hope and consolations. Whenever it is not; it is still the termination of all his sorrows.

In the future world the difference is infinite. When the good man resigns his body to the grave, and his spirit to the hands of God who gave it; he *enters* immediately into *the joy of his Lord.* Sin and suffering, time and death, hold their dominion over him no more. The dawn of his future being is to him the dawn of everlasting day. In this immense duration his life will be an uninterrupted progress of virtue, honour, and enjoyment. Fixed for ever in the world of glory, and surrounded by the general assembly of the first-born, a companion of angels, and a child of God, he will look back with ineffable delight on that choice, which accomplished the end of his being, and made life and death blessings to him; and will stretch his view forward with transport to joy succeeding joy, and to glory surpassing glory, throughout ages which cannot end.

SERMON CLXIV.

IMMEDIATE CONSEQUENCES OF DEATH.

Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return to God who gave it.—ECCLES. XII. 7.

IN my last discourse I made several observations concerning death, considered as the last dispensation of providence to man in the present world. *The immediate consequences of death* furnish the next subject of our investigation.

In the text we are told, that when *man goeth to his long home, the dust,* or body, *shall return to the earth,* of which it was formed, and that then also *the spirit shall return to God who gave it.* In considering this subject, I shall follow the order of discourse here presented to us; and examine those things which immediately after death respect,

I. *The body;* and,

II. *The soul.*

Under the former of these heads I observe,

1. *That the body is changed into a corpse.*

Death is the termination of all the animal functions of our nature. So long as these continue, life, the result of them, diffuses warmth, activity, and beauty, throughout our frame. In this state, the body is a useful as well as pleasing habitation for the soul; and a necessary, as well as convenient, instrument for accomplishing the purposes to which it is destined in the present world. But when these functions cease, life also ceases. The body then becomes cold, motionless, deformed, and useless. The form which once gave pleasure to all around it, now creates only pain and sorrow. The limbs are stiffened; the face clouded with paleness; the eye closed in darkness; the ear deaf; the voice dumb; and the whole appearance ghastly and dreadful. In the mean time, the spirit deserts its ruined

habitation, and wings its way into the unknown vast of being.

2. *The body is conveyed to the grave.*

Necessity compels the living to remove this decayed frame from their sight. Different nations have pursued different modes of accomplishing this purpose. By some nations the body has been consumed with fire. By others it has been embalmed. By some it has been lodged in tombs, properly so called. By some it has been consigned to vaults and caverns; and by most has been buried in the grave. All nations, in whatever manner they have disposed of the remains of their departed friends, have with one consent wished, like Abraham, *to remove their dead out of their sight.*

In this situation the body becomes the prey of corruption, and the feast of worms. How humiliating an allotment is this to the pride of man! When the conqueror, returned from the slaughter of millions, enters his capital in triumph; when the trumpet of fame proclaims his approach, and the shouts of millions announce his victories; surrounded by the spoils of subjugated nations, and followed by trains of vanquished kings and heroes; how must his haughty spirit be lowered to the dust by the remembrance, that within a few days himself would become the food of a worm, reigning over him with a more absolute control than he ever exercised over his slaves. Yet this will be the real end of all his achievements. To this humble level must descend the tenant of the throne, as well as of the cottage. Here wisdom and folly, learning and ignorance, refinement and vulgarity, will lie down together. Hither moves, with an unconscious but regular step, the beauty that illumines "the gay assembly's gayest room;" that subdues the heart even of the conqueror himself; and says, "I sit as queen, and shall see no sorrow." All these may and must ultimately say to corruption, *Thou art our father, and to the worm, Thou art our mother, and our sister.* But we are not yet at the end of the progress. The next stage in our humiliation is, to be changed into dust. This was our origin: this is our end. The very clods on which we tread, were once not improbably, parts, to a greater or less extent, of living beings like ourselves. Not a small part

of the surface of this world has, in all probability, been animated and inhabited by human minds: and the remains of man are daily perhaps, as well as insensibly, turned up by the plough and the spade.

II. *The events which immediately after death concern the soul are the following.*

1. *At death the soul quits the body, to return to it no more.*

At death the animal functions cease; or rather the cessation of them is death itself. Then the flexibility, the power of action, and the consequent usefulness to which they gave birth, are terminated also. The soul of course finds the body no longer fitted to be an instrument of its wishes or its duties. The limbs can no longer convey it from place to place; the tongue communicate its thoughts; nor the hands execute its pleasure. Deprived of all its powers, the body becomes a useless and uncomfortable residence for a being, to whose nature activity is essential, and the purposes of whose creation would be frustrated by a longer confinement to so unsuitable a mansion. We cannot wonder, therefore, that the Author of our being should in his providence remove the soul from a situation so contradictory in all respects to the design of its existence.

The proof of the fact which I am considering, and of the existence of the soul in a state of separation from the body, has to a great extent been necessarily given in a former discourse; in which I attempted to shew that the soul is not material. To that discourse I must therefore refer my audience for these proofs. It may however not be improper briefly to mention some of them on the present occasion.

The first which I shall mention, is *the text.* Here we are informed, that *the dust,* at death, *shall return to the earth as it was; and the spirit shall return to God who gave it.* That the soul and body are two distinct beings, and that at death one returns to the earth, and the other to God who gave it, are truths declared in this passage in a manner so plain, as probably never to have been misapprehended by any man not embarked in some philosophical controversy.

Secondly; *Of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob* it is said, accordingly, *that they gave up the ghost, or resigned their spirits to God who gave them.* In Exodus iii. 6, *I am the God of thy father, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.* *God,* our Saviour observes, *is not the God of the dead, but of the living;* that is, of the spirits of *Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob;* living at the time when this declaration was made to Moses. Accordingly this passage is alleged by our Saviour to the Sadducees, as full proof of the ανασταση, or separate existence of souls beyond the grave.

Of these persons also *it is said,* that *they were gathered unto their people.* This declaration is commonly but very erroneously understood to mean, that *their bodies were gathered to the bodies of their kindred;* and is supposed to be equivalent to the scriptural phrase, *They slept with their fathers.* But in this sense it is, in many instances, obviously untrue. Neither *Abraham* nor *Isaac* was in this sense gathered unto his people. The people of *Abraham* were all buried in *Padan Aram,* or in *Ur of the Chaldees;* while *he* was buried in *the cave of Macpelah* in Canaan. Isaac was buried with none of his friends beside his parents; and these could not be styled his people. The people to whom these persons were gathered, were the assembly of the blessed.

Thirdly; In conformity to this interpretation, *Christ says, concerning Lazarus, that he died, and was carried by angels to Abraham's bosom:* a complete proof that Abraham was in existence among the blessed at the time to which this parable refers.

Fourthly; Christ said to the penitent thief on the cross, *To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise.* This could not be true, unless the soul of the thief existed in a separate state.

Fifthly; St. Paul declares, 2 Cor. v. 6, that, *While we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord;* and subjoins, *We are confident, I say, willing rather to be absent from the body, and present with the Lord.* Here this apostle teaches us, that Christians can be absent from the body; and that this absence must take place to enable them to be present with the Lord; and that, whenever it does take place, they will be present with the Lord. Chris-

tians therefore, that is the spirits of Christians, exist in a state separated from the body.

Sixthly; The same apostle, Phil. i. 21—23, says, *For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain;* and again, *I have a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better.* When the apostle says, *For me to live is Christ,* he declares, that the present life is to him a source of high enjoyment. But if he did not exist in a separate state, his death would put an end to all his enjoyment; being an absolute termination of his consciousness. If then he had the least degree of enjoyment while living, his death destroying this enjoyment, and supplying no other in its place, would with mathematical certainty be a loss to him. How much greater must this loss be, when, as he informs us, *It was Christ to live to him.* Can any sober man believe, that St. Paul meant to declare death, which, according to the opposite scheme, is merely a temporary annihilation, to be greater good than the happiness indicated by this expressive phraseology?

But the apostle himself has determined this point. He has told us, that the gain of his departure consisted in being with Christ, in a state of happiness totally superior to any thing found in the present world. Here indeed he enjoyed the presence of his Saviour, in an eminent, perhaps in a singular degree; yet in a manner far inferior to what he was assured he should find immediately after death.

Seventhly; *St. John, when caught up to heaven, beheld a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palms in their hands, uniting with the angels in their everlasting song of praise.* The apostle asked who these persons were. The interpreting angel informed him, that *they were those who came out of great tribulation, and had washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore,* he adds, *are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat: for the Lamb, which is in*

the midst of the throne, shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes. It will not be denied, that these were men, and deceased men; nor that the time referred to in this passage was long antecedent to the resurrection. They were therefore separate spirits; conscious, virtuous, happy beings. It may be said, and truly, that all this passed in vision. But it must be added, and must be admitted by those who say this, that a vision, communicated by the Spirit of God, exhibits nothing but what is true.

Eighthly; In conformity to this representation of St. John, St. Paul says, 1 Thess. iv. 14, *For if we believe that Jesus died, and rose again, even so them also who sleep in Jesus will God bring with him;* that is, as the sixteenth verse informs us, when he comes to the final judgment. Who are those whom God will bring with Christ at this time? Certainly not the bodies of the saints. They will be raised from the grave, and cannot be brought with Christ. The only answer therefore is, he will bring with him *the spirits of just men made perfect.*

Ninthly; *Christ informs us, that Lazarus died, and was carried by angels to Abraham's bosom; that the rich man died, and in hell lift up his eyes, being in torments; and all this, while the five brethren of the rich man were still living in the present world.* Now I ask, whether the body of the rich man was at this time in hell, or the body of Lazarus carried by angels to Abraham's bosom? These questions can need no answer. The consequence is therefore unavoidable. Should an objector say, that this representation is parabolical, he will say it only to escape from an argument which he cannot face. That parables are figurative representations is acknowledged. But he must be a hardy commentator who will assert that they exhibit any thing but truth.

I might multiply proofs of this doctrine to a very great extent; for the language of the Scriptures concerning this subject is entirely uniform. But I shall only add one more of a nature somewhat different from those which have been already alleged. The body of Moses was buried by God *in a valley, in the land of Moab, over against Beth-peor.*

Yet Moses appeared on the mount of transfiguration, and conversed with Christ.

With this scheme of interpreting the Scriptures, almost all who have professed to believe them, have coincided in every age of the church. Probably no individual has ever thought of finding in them the opposite doctrine, unless when forced to it by a wish to support some other favourite tenet. Dr. Priestley has plainly adopted it, because he thought the immateriality of the soul inconsistent with his views concerning the nature of Christ.

There is no more difficulty in supposing the soul of man to be capable of existing in a state of separation from the body, than in supposing any other spirit to be capable of existing without a body. Angels we know are unembodied. In the same state the spirits of deceased persons may exist with as little difficulty in the eye of sound philosophy as angels. Aware of this truth, Dr. Priestley has strenuously laboured to disprove the existence of angels also; in my view, without the least aid of philosophy, and in direct defiance of revelation. If the Scriptures do not assert the existence of angels, they cannot be said to assert any thing; for they do not assert any thing with more clearness or precision. If their assertions concerning this subject can be subverted by criticism, there can be no assertions which criticism may not subvert.

2. *The soul after death returns immediately to God, to give an account of its conduct in the present life.*

This appears to be the plain language of the text, in which the return of the body to the dust, and of the soul to God, are exhibited as coexisting events. That the purpose of its return to God is, that it may give up its account, appears sufficiently plain from the parables of the talents and the pounds. In these, each of the servants is exhibited as summoned to give, and as actually giving, his account to his lord concerning his use or abuse of the privileges intrusted to him immediately after the close of his stewardship. Nor is there, so far as I have observed, any thing in the Scriptures which is at all inconsistent with this scheme of our future destination.

In this account will be unfolded alike the state of the thoughts, and that of the external conduct. Of course the

soul will be furnished with a power of reflection sufficiently capacious to comprehend all that it has done, and will be compelled to declare it without disguise, enhancement, or evasion. Its secret chambers, and all which they contain, or have ever contained, will be laid open to its own eye, as well as to that of its Maker. In this manner, the motives by which it has been governed, and the moral character which it has sustained, during its probation, will be so entirely developed, as to satisfy even itself, that the investigation had been just, as well as complete.

3. *The sentence of God will be pronounced in perfect righteousness on all that it has done.*

To those who have done the will of God, loved his character, believed in his Son, and turned away from their iniquities, he will say, *Well done, good and faithful servants, ye have been faithful over a few things, I will make you rulers over many things; enter ye into the joy of your Lord.* Of those who have refused or neglected to do these things he will say, *Take ye the unprofitable servants, and cast them into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

4. *In consequence of this sentence, the soul will immediately enter upon a state of reward.*

When Lazarus died, he was carried by angels to *Abraham's bosom.* His *evil things*, or sufferings, were all terminated; and he was henceforth *comforted*, or made happy, for ever. When *the rich man died, he lift up his eyes in* ᾅδης, *being in torments;* and is declared *to have received all his good things* in the present life.

There has been no small debate among divines, and those of great reputation, concerning *the places where the dead will reside, between their departure from this world and the final judgment.* This subject demands too extensive a consideration to be attempted at the present time. It must be acknowledged, that the language of the Scriptures furnishes a foundation for some difference of opinion concerning it. Several expressions, found in both Testaments, seem to indicate an *intermediate place*, as well as an *intermediate state of existence*, between this world and the final scenes of retribution. After a considerable examination of this subject, and an examination of several able commen-

tators who have handled it to some extent, I am obliged to confess myself not altogether satisfied; and to say, that hitherto I have found difficulties on both sides. I know of no method in which they can be removed, except a direct recurrence to every scriptural passage which relates to the subject, a thorough consideration of each, and an attentive comparison of them all. It is undoubtedly true, that the Hebrew שְׁאוֹל sheol, and the Greek ἁδης, commonly rendered *hell*, or the *grave*, in our translation, do not properly signify either; but always *the world of departed spirits*. As these words have so extensive a signification, and must be interpreted by every passage of Scripture referring to that world; there must be room for considerable difference of opinion.* But, whatever may be true concerning an intermediate place of existence, there can, I apprehend, be no reasonable doubt concerning an intermediate state. St. Peter says of the angels that sinned, that *God cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment*. St. Jude also declares *them to be reserved*, in like manner, *unto the judgment of the great day*. From these declarations it is manifest, that fallen angels have not yet received their final judgment, nor of course their final reward. This indeed seems evident from the phraseology used by St. Peter, as well as by the declarations of both him and St. Jude. The word which is rendered from St. Peter, *cast them down to hell*, is in the Greek, ταρταρωσας; literally rendered, *cast them down to Tartarus*. While this phraseology plainly declares a state of punishment, it indicates directly a different state from that which is taught by the word γεεννα; the appropriate name of hell in the Scriptures. After *the rich man died, and was buried*, it is said by our Saviour, *he lift up his eyes in hell, being in torments:* in the Greek, εν τω ἁδη, *in hades he lift up his eyes, being in torments*. This word also denotes, with sufficient clearness, a different state of suffering from that which is intended by the word γεεννα. In the same parable, *Lazarus* is declared to be *carried by angels to Abraham's bosom*. The state in which *Lazarus* is placed

* See particularly on this subject Dr. Campbell's Sixth Preliminary Dissertation, part 2; and Peters on Job.

is denoted elsewhere by the word *paradise*, [illegible], said our Saviour to the thief on the cross, *thou shalt be with me in paradise*. But we know from our Saviour's own declaration, that when he gave up the ghost on the cross, his spirit went, not to hell, but to hades or sheol. For in the sixteenth psalm he himself says, "Thou wilt not leave my soul in sheol:" rendered both by the Septuagint, and by St. Peter (quoting this passage, Acts ii. 27, and referring it in ver. 31), by hades, the Greek word, by which sheol is always translated both in the Old and New Testament. Thus it is, *Thou wilt not leave my soul in hades*, and in ver. 31, *his soul was not left in hades*. The thief therefore went to the state which is denoted by this word; and not to that which is denoted by heaven, unless this word is supposed to include heaven.

In Heb. xi. 39, 40, St. Paul says of the ancient saints, *And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.* The promise here denotes, I apprehend, the good or reward promised to faith and obedience in its full extent. This good the ancient saints are here declared not to have received in this extensive manner: something better being reserved for Christians under the gospel, in which they are to share, together with those who have gone before them, when they shall be all gathered into the divine kingdom, and the state of perfection shall finally arrive.

In accordance with these observations, Christ informs us that the righteous will possess *the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world;* and the wicked *depart into the everlasting fire* (εις το πυρ αιωνιον) *prepared for the devil and his angels*, not before, but after the general judgment. St. John also, in the 20th and 21st chapters of the Apocalypse, teaches us, that the wicked will be cast into a lake of fire; and that the state of glory destined for the enjoyment of the righteous, and denoted by his vision of the New Jerusalem, will commence after the judgment is finished. These, in both instances, are the states of existence denoted in scriptural language by the words *heaven* and *hell*.

Still, virtuous men, when they leave this world, go to a

state of enjoyment only; and impenitent men to a state of mere suffering. Lazarus was only comforted after he left this world; and the rich man was only tormented. St. Paul informs us, that when good men are *absent from the body*, they are *present with the Lord*. The favourable presence of Christ will therefore be afforded to all his followers; and he will begin to exhibit to them, in a glorious manner, the *everlasting kindness* with which he has had *mercy on them*. When the bodies of mankind are reunited to their spirits, there can be no doubt, that the happiness of the righteous, and the misery of the wicked, will be rendered more complete. But, antecedently to that event, both the happiness and the misery will be entire and unmingled. The happiness will in no degree be alloyed by suffering; the misery will in no degree be lessened by enjoyment.

REMARKS.

1. *From these considerations appears with strong evidence, the folly of that excessive attention so commonly rendered to our bodies.*

Not a small proportion of the care, anxiety, and labour, of man is employed upon the body. So far as necessity, decency, and comfort, demand these exertions, the demand is certainly reasonable; and will be complied with, when it is in his power, by every wise man. But there are certainly limits to this employment fixed by revelation, and seen and acknowledged by reason. To take, even in this way, the real *good of all our labour under the sun*, is plainly included in that *portion which God hath given us of this* labour. The allowance is certainly liberal and sufficient. But there are anxieties experienced, there are efforts made, which are productive of no such good. Common sense continually discerns and declares this truth. These anxities and efforts are also immensely numerous, eager, and painful. It is necessary to have food; it is desirable, that that food should be wholesome and pleasant. It is necessary to have clothes: it is desirable that our clothes should be convenient and becoming. But there may be excessive care to gratify the palate, and to adorn the person. I know of no rational objection to that mode of life, regularly demanded by common sense, which, according with the cha-

racter and circumstances of an individual pronounced by the general sense of propriety to be [illegible] station. Yet the whole of life is certainly not to be consumed either in pampering or adorning the person. Our life is the only period of our probation; and, during that probation, eternal life is to be gained or lost. With such an employment on our hands, it is madness to waste this little period in providing the means of luxury, to pamper our palates and our pride. Would the epicure, while feasting his sight, and smell, and taste, on viands, to collect which he has perhaps ransacked both the Indies, remember, that he is pampering his body merely to make it a more dainty meal to the worms of the dust; it is questionable whether the keenness of his relish would not be blunted, and his solicitude concerning *what he should eat, and what he should drink*, exchanged for a more becoming anxiety concerning the means by which he might live for ever. Were the monarch on his throne, to adorn whom the south has yielded up its gold, and the east lavished its gems, to recollect, that within a few days he would be wrapped in a shroud, and lodged in the grave; would not all these splendours fade upon his eye, and pall upon his heart? Were the beauty, who swims through the dance, or sparkles in the drawing-room, with the conscious superiority of her charms, and amid the homage of surrounding admirers, to call to mind, that the form which, Narcissus-like, she surveyed in the glass with rapture, must within a few days be chilled by the icy hand of death, the roses fade from her cheeks, the splendour vanish from her eyes, and all her elegance of form be dissolved in dust; must she not be compelled to believe, that her vanity was misplaced and worthless; and that she squandered life upon objects equally undeserving and mischievous; and that to acquire beauty of mind, to become lovely in the sight of God, and to merit the esteem of angels throughout eternity, were pursuits infinitely more worthy of rational ambition?

The manner in which God has exhibited his views concerning our bodies is in no measure calculated to raise them in our estimation. He formed them out of earth. He made them so frail, as to be subjected to accident, pain, and disease, in ten thousand forms. At death he returns them to

earth again. This is their final end. *Flesh and blood will not inherit the kingdom of God.* How can pride, vanity, or ambition, dwell so fondly on a subject so full of frailty and humiliation?

2. *By the same considerations, we are taught the folly and indecency of pride.*

Pride is a passion cherished and fondled in every human bosom. Still it is one of the most dangerous enemies to our true interests. I have formerly exhibited it as the commencing sin of man; the real beginning of human apostasy. From that time to the present, it has been a prime part of our rebellion against God. It is also a principal source of our injurious treatment of each other; mingles with all our love of the world, even with our devotion to pleasure; is unkind; unjust; insincere; impatient of the prosperity of others; jealous; hard-hearted; cruel as the grave; arrogating to itself the blessings of mankind and the prerogatives of God; unbelieving; and obdurate. With these things in view, we shall not wonder to find it in every degree pernicious to ourselves. *Pride,* says Solomon, *goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.*

Both the word and works of God furnish innumerable dissuasives from the indulgence of pride; all of them however insufficient to overcome this obstinate evil. Among them, few are more happily adapted to this end, than the truths which have been mentioned on the present occasion. When we look around with exultation on the advantages which we fancy ourselves to possess over our fellow-men, and let loose the pride of wealth, the pride of office, the pride of influence, the pride of taste, and the pride of reputation; when we turn our eyes upon ourselves, with all the dotage exercised by a fond and foolish parent towards a favourite child, and become inflated with the pride of beauty, the pride of talents, or that most odious of all pride, which is customarily styled *self-righteousness;* we can hardly fail of being humbled and crest-fallen, if we call to mind the end of all our loftiness exhibited in this discourse. Go to the burying-ground, and walk over its dark and solemn recesses. On whom do you tread? *On the mighty man, and the man of war, the judge, and the prophet, and*

the prudent, and the ancient, the captain of fifty, and the honourable man, and the counsellor, and the cunning artificer, and the eloquent orator. What are they now? A mass of dust? What have they been? The food of worms. Is it possible, that beings destined to this end should be proud? It is possible. You and I are proud, as were once these wretched tenants of the grave; and are destined to the same humble, deplorable end. When therefore you contemplate with high self-complacency the advantages of person which you possess, or the endowments of the mind; when you look down from superiority of birth, riches, character, or influence, on those below you, and your bosoms swell with the consciousness of distinction; remember your end, and be proud no more. Remember, that your gayest attire will soon be exchanged for a winding-sheet, and your most splendid habitations for the grave.

Remember also, that the pride which you now indulge, will in the future world become to you a source of the deepest humiliation. In the grave, the beggar and the slave will lie on the same level with you. But in the future world, every humble child of Adam will become your superior. Unless you renounce your pride, and assume the humility of the gospel; the beggar and the slave, in many instances, will rise to a superiority above you, higher than your minds can conceive; and look down upon you with a contempt and abhorrence which, although you may deserve, you have never been able to feel. You, in the mean time, will sink to a depth of degradation which your present powers cannot measure; and will feel yourselves lowered to a double depth by seeing those, whom hitherto you have only despised, elevated to endless dignity and glory. When the day shall arrive *which shall burn like an oven, all the proud shall be stubble; and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of Hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch.*

3. *These considerations ought to remind us how near the solemn events mentioned in this discourse are to ourselves.*

It is a propensity of human nature to believe, that the day of death must be distant, because we wish it to be distant. This propensity is continually strengthened, like

others, by indulgence; as is also the wish for its tardy arrival. In this respect we exactly resemble those Israelitish sensualists, whose character the prophet Amos describes in this remarkable address. *Ye that put far away the evil day*, and like those who said concerning the prophecies of Ezekiel, *The vision that he seeth is for many days to come; and he prophesieth of the times that are far off.* As this propensity is indulged daily, and is checked only by a few peculiarly solemn events; such as our own sicknesses, and the deaths of those who are near to us; as all around us exercise the same disposition; and as the subject is so gloomy as never to be contemplated without pain, nor dismissed without pleasure: most persons rarely think of death at all; and, whenever this unwelcome subject intrudes into their minds, either force it out with violence, or forget it as speedily as they can. Hence so many of mankind, hence so many of *us*, make apparently little or no preparation for this solemn event.

What palpable folly is manifested in this conduct! Death is not the less near to us, because we choose to think it distant; nor the less interesting, because we disregard it; nor the less awful, because we lull our fears of it to sleep. We know that we must die: we know that death will terminate our probation: and are assured that it will introduce us to the judgment. Wisdom therefore demands, common sense demands, that we should make effectual preparation for death, by preparing ourselves for the judgment. Among the means of accomplishing this work, few are so efficacious as the solemn, habitual, realizing contemplation of these subjects. He who daily revolves in his mind, and laboriously brings home to his heart, death and the judgment, will scarcely fail of very serious exertions to become ready for these affecting scenes.

Probably not a person who is here present will survive seventy years from this day. A great proportion will be in the grave, ascend to the judgment, and enter upon the recompense of reward, within fifty years: not a small number within twenty: some in all probability, God only knows how many, within ten, five, two, or even one. Where then will be our schemes of pleasure, pride, avarice, and ambition? Where shall we ourselves be? When we open

our eyes on the eternal world, and mark the incomprehensible vast which is before us; how strong will the reasons appear which urged us to prepare ourselves for this amazing existence! How immensely desirable will it seem to enter upon boundless being with a complete provision for our comfort throughout its interminable ages: a provision which will fill up every passing year with enjoyment, and leave an ample supply for the countless multitude which are to come!

Think, I beseech you to think, how soon the little time of life will be gone to *you;* with what a rapid flight hours, and days, and years, hasten over your heads. What is the amount of your past life? A moment. What will be the amount of your life which is yet to come? Another moment. And then you will be summoned to the judgment.

4. *How awful must be the final interview!*

How awful is the character of *him* to whose presence our souls will be summoned! From him we derived our being. By him we are continued in being. On him we are dependant for every blessing and every hope. To him we are accountable for all our conduct. Of that conduct he has been an eye-witness from the beginning. He is the God against whom we have sinned; who infinitely hates sin; and who has recorded all our transgressions in his book. He is our Judge; he is our Rewarder; his frown is hell; his smile is heaven.

How amazing is the end for which we shall appear at this interview! It is no other than to settle for ever the concerns of the soul. It is to fix our condition throughout the ages of immortality. It is to render an account of all that we have done in the present life, that we may be rewarded according to our works. On this account are suspended endless happiness and endless misery.

How affecting must be the situation of the soul at this interview! It stands in the presence of God, the Judge of all, alone; without a friend to help; without an advocate to plead its cause; its all depending; itself to be disposed of for ever.

Let me solemnly ask this assembly, Are you prepared for this awful event? Is your account ready? Is it such

an account as you are willing to give? Is it such a one as you believe your Judge will accept? Would you be willing to render it this day? Are you willing to hazard your souls upon it; your acceptance; your immortality? Or is it an account which will cover you with shame, agony, and despair? Have you lived hitherto only to do evil, to *treasure up wrath*, and to enhance your ruin? Is the great work of your life yet to be begun? Will it be still to be begun to-morrow; the next year; in old age; on a dying bed? Has your whole course hitherto been directed, shall it through life be directed, towards perdition; and not a single step taken towards heaven?

SERMON CLXV.

THE REMOTER CONSEQUENCES OF DEATH.

THE RESURRECTION.

For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised.—
1 COR. XV. 16.

IN the preceding discourse, I considered *the immediate consequences of death;* in this, I shall begin an inquiry concerning *its remoter consequences.* The first of these is *the resurrection of the body.*

The subject of this chapter is the *αναστασις, or future existence of man.* This word is commonly, but often erroneously, rendered *resurrection.* So far as I have observed, it usually denotes *our existence beyond the grave.* Its original and literal meaning is, *to stand up, or to stand again.* As *standing* is the appropriate posture of *life, consciousness, and activity;* and *lying down* the appropriate posture of *the dead, the unconscious,* and *the inactive;* this word is not unnaturally employed to denote the future state of spirits, who are living, conscious, active beings. Many passages of Scripture would have been rendered more intelligible, and the thoughts contained in them more just and impres-

sive, had this word been translated agreeably to its real meaning. This observation will be sufficiently illustrated by a recurrence to that remarkable passage which contains the dispute between our Saviour and the Sadducees. Matt. xxii. 23. *Then came to him*, says the evangelist, *the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection:* μη ειναι αναστασιν, *that there is no future state, or no future existence of mankind.* The objection which they bring to Christ against the doctrine of a future state, is founded upon the Jewish law of marriage, which required that a surviving brother should marry the widow of a brother deceased. In conformity to this law, they declare seven brothers to have married successively one wife; who survived them all. They then ask, *Whose wife shall she be in the resurrection?* εν τη αναστασει; *in the future state?* They could not suppose, that she would be any man's wife in the resurrection: a momentary event; and of such a nature as to forbid even the supposition, that the relations of the present life could be of the least possible importance, or be regarded with the least possible attention, during its transitory existence. Our Saviour answers them, *In the resurrection*, or as it should be rendered, *in the future state, they neither marry nor are given in marriage; but are as the angels of God in heaven. But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoke unto you by God;* or as it ought to be rendered, *Have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, concerning the future existence of those who are dead, saying, I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.* This passage, were we at any loss concerning the meaning of the word αναστασις, determines it beyond a dispute. The proof that there is an αναστασις of the dead alleged by our Saviour, is the declaration of God to Moses, *I am the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob;* and the irresistible truth, *that God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.* The consequence, as every one who reads the Bible knows, is, that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, were living at the time when this declaration was made. Those who die therefore live after they are dead, and this future life is the αναστασις, concerning which there was so much debate between the Pharisees and Sadducees; which is proved by

our Saviour in this passage; and which is universally denoted by this term throughout the New Testament. Nothing is more evident, than that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, had not risen from the dead; and that the declaration concerning them is therefore no proof of the resurrection. But it is certain that they were living beings; and therefore this passage is a complete proof that mankind live after death.

The appropriate Greek word for resurrection is εγερσις, as in Matt. xxvii. 52, 53. *Many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after his resurrection;* μετα την εγερσιν αυτου.

The αναστασις is the thing mentioned as having been denied by some of the Corinthian Christians. See verse 12th of the text. *How say some among you, that there is no resurrection, no* future life or existence *of the dead?* A person who reads the Epistles to the Corinthians with reference to the object, will easily perceive that there was at least one heretical teacher, at the head of the faction in the Corinthian church, who refused submission to the authority of the apostle. This man seems evidently to have been a Jew; and was most probably a Sadducee; as he brought over several members of this church to the great Sadducean error; the denial of a future state. To remove this error from that church, and to prevent its existence ever afterward, was obviously the design of St. Paul in writing this chapter. Accordingly he shews its absurdity in the most triumphant manner, in the first thirty-four verses; and with equal success elucidates and proves the contrary doctrine. In the remainder of the discourse, he dwells extensively on the nature of the body with which those who are dead will be invested at the final day; declares the change which those who are living at that time will experience; and concludes with a song of triumph over death and *hades*, and a solemn exhortation to Christians steadfastly to abound in the service of God.

I have remarked, that the doctrine denied by some of the Corinthian Christians, was, strictly speaking, *that of a future existence in another world.* As this existence will in fact be connected with the future existence of the body, and therefore with the resurrection properly so called; St. Paul,

in order to remove the objections of such as opposed it, and the difficulties and doubts of others, and to disclose the truth concerning this interesting subject, has entered into an extensive discussion concerning the resurrection. The future existence of the soul will *in fact* be connected with the future existence of the body. To give a just and comprehensive view of the *former* of these subjects, it was necessary therefore to enter into a particular consideration of the *latter*. Accordingly, St. Paul commences his examination of it in the thirty-fifth verse, by putting an objection against a future state into the mouth of an opponent, derived from apprehended difficulties concerning the future existence of the body. The objection is indeed without weight; as it is merely an expression of the objector's ignorance concerning the subject, and his inability to imagine what kind of body, or by what means any body, can be united to the soul in the future world. Still it is the objection which probably rises sooner and in more minds against the doctrine, than any other which can be alleged. It was therefore suggested by St. Paul with the utmost propriety.

In considering this objection the apostle not only removes it, but unfolds also many truths concerning it of the most edifying and glorious nature. Indeed, this chapter is one of the first specimens of that expansion and sublimity of intellect, for which St. Paul is distinguished above every other writer. Nothing in Heathen antiquity can be found among poets, orators, or philosophers, which in loftiness of conception or extensiveness of views deserves to be named in comparison with this discourse. From the very proposition of the subject, the writer begins to ascend: and with an eagle-wing rises higher and higher throughout all his progress, until he lifts himself and elevates the mind of his reader to the heavens.

In the text, the resurrection of the body is asserted and proved. The proof alleged is the resurrection of Christ; and the argument may be advantageously exhibited in the following manner. Christ predicted his own resurrection, and actually rose in the manner predicted. He has thus proved both his power to do every thing, and his veracity in all his declarations. But he has declared, that he

will raise up at the last day all that are in their graves. Thus his own resurrection is a complete proof of the general resurrection of mankind.

This doctrine has in one manner and another been opposed by various sorts of men, in most ages of the world. The Sadducees denied all future existence to man. The Athenian philosophers, when Paul preached to them Jesus and the *αναστασις*, said, *What will this babbler*, this scatterer of words, *say?* In modern times, infidels extensively have denied the future existence of both soul and body; and there have not been wanting those who, professing themselves to be Christians, have entertained unwarrantable opinions and found many difficulties relative to this subject. This opposition and these difficulties seem however not to be suggested by the intellect, but to spring from the imagination. When we begin to think concerning the separate existence of the soul; we naturally follow our customary course of thought concerning intelligent beings. All these with whom we directly correspond are embodied, and therefore obvious to our senses. We are taught, that souls in a separate state of existence are unembodied, and therefore unsusceptible of form and visible appearance. Of their places of residence, modes of existence, modes of communication, pursuits, enjoyments, and sufferings, we know almost nothing. This chasm in our knowledge we endeavour to fill up by the aid of imagination; and proceed, almost of course, to form *images* of such spirits, of the world in which they dwell, and of the manner in which they exist, communicate, are busied, enjoy, and suffer. With respect to all these things however, we find our imagination, after its utmost efforts, unable even to satisfy itself, and much more unable to satisfy the understanding. The world which we thus form, its inhabitants, and their circumstances, are never such as that we can realize their actual existence. Hence we give them up as unreal and visionary; and by a transition exceedingly common, although usually unobserved, we consider the decision, made merely by our fancy, as made in fact by our understanding. Against this decision, arguments are often urged in vain. We may be, we usually are, unable to refute such as are advanced in opposition to it; but finding ourselves unable to conceive in our

imagination the state of things urged upon our belief, we hesitate concerning it, and then doubt, and perhaps ultimately deny, its existence.

That this is a just account of the real state of many minds, with respect to this subject, I fully believe, from observations which have been actually made to myself; and beg leave to add, that this is far from being the only case in which the imagination is suffered to control the dictates of the understanding. Not only in those familiar instances, where the mind receives strong impressions from the operations of this faculty, is the intellect induced to admit that which is unsupported by evidence; but in numerous others also it is equally influenced, and inclined to refuse its faith to positions abundantly evinced, merely because it cannot imagine the manner in which objects involved in those truths can exist. In this way, its views concerning subjects pertaining to the future world, often receive a very unhappy bias.

Another source of perplexity, with regard to the doctrine of the resurrection, has been the question, *whether the same body will be raised;* a question extensively agitated, with no small ardour and anxiety. All the difficulties which attend this subject are derived, as it appears to me, either from extending our philosophical inquiries beyond the power of the understanding to answer them, as is sometimes done, or from neglecting to settle what we intend by sameness. If the question intends, *whether the same atoms which have composed our bodies in the present world will constitute the body raised at the final day?* both reason and revelation answer it in the negative. The whole number of particles which have, at different times, constituted the body of a man, during his progress through life, will undoubtedly be sufficient to constitute many such bodies. St. Paul also observes to the objector, in answer to this very question, *Thou fool; that which thou sowest is not quickened except it die; and that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body which shall be, but bare grain: it may chance of wheat, or of some other grain; but God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him. So also is the resurrection of the dead.* And again, *Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.* This

scheme of thought he pursues from the thirty-fourth verse throughout most of the chapter.

If the same constitution, arrangement, and qualities, of the body be intended by the question, it is equally evident that the same body will not be raised. This is decisively taught us in the last-quoted declaration, and in the passage immediately following: *Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption.* It is also clearly shewn by the general tenor of the reasoning contained in the whole passage. Reason too decides with absolute certainty, that a constitution, which involves in its nature decay and termination, cannot belong to a body destined for the residence of an immortal and ever-vigorous mind.

Should it be asked, *Whether some of the same particles which are found in our earthly bodies will not be transferred to those which will be formed at the resurrection:* I answer, that this point has not been determined in the Scriptures, and that the determination of it lies beyond the reach of philosophy. Let me add, that the question itself is perfectly nugatory.

That the body will be *the same, in such a sense as to be known,* appears sufficiently evident from the Scriptures. Even departed spirits, in their intermediate state, appear plainly to be exhibited in the gospel as known to each other. Our Saviour informs us, that *many shall come from the east, and from the west, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God, with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob.* In order to a complete fulfilment of the intention of this promise, it seems necessary that the persons here spoken of should know these patriarchs. Lazarus, Abraham, and the rich man, are all exhibited in the parable as known to each other. Moses and Elias also were known by the disciples on the mount of transfiguration to be Moses and Elias, one of them an embodied, the other an unembodied spirit. From these facts, it is I think sufficiently evident, that mankind will know each other in the future world, and that their bodies will so far be the same as to become the means of this knowledge.

Against the resurrection itself there is no presumption, and in favour of it a strong one, from analogy. Many

works of God naturally and strongly dispose the mind to admit the doctrine without hesitation. In this climate almost the whole vegetable world dies annually under the chilling influence of winter. At the return of spring the face of nature is renewed, and all the plants, shrubs, and trees, with which it is adorned, are again clothed with verdure, life, and beauty.

In the insect creation we find a direct and striking example of the resurrection itself. Animals of this class begin their existence in the form of worms. After continuing some time in the humble state of being to which they are necessarily confined by their structure, they die, and are gone. In the moment of death, they construct for themselves a species of shell or tomb, in which they may with the strictest propriety be said to be buried. Here they are dissolved into a mass of semi-transparent water: the whole which remains of the previously existing animal, exhibiting to the eye no trace of life, and no promise of a future revival. When the term of its burial approaches to a period, the tomb discloses; and a winged animal comes forth with a nobler form, often exquisitely beautiful; brilliant with the gayest splendour; possessed of new and superior powers, and destined to a more refined and more exalted life. Its food is now the honey of flowers, its field of being the atmosphere. Here it expatiates at large in the delightful exercise of its faculties, and in the high enjoyment of those sunbeams which were the immediate means of its newly-acquired existence.

Could there be a rational, or even a specious doubt concerning the power of God, and his sufficiency to raise the body from the grave; this change in the world of insects, accomplished before our eyes, and for these animals not less extraordinary than that which we are contemplating is for man, puts an end to every such doubt; and places the possibility of this event beyond debate. In truth, this change is nothing less than a glorious type of the resurrection.

Whatever sameness may attend the body at the resurrection, it is clear from the Scriptures, that in many important particulars it will be greatly changed; so much changed, as to wear in various respects an entirely new character. These I shall now proceed to mention.

1. *The body will be raised incorruptible.*

It is sown, says St. Paul, *in corruption; it is raised in incorruption.*

One of the most striking characteristics of the human body, in its present state, is its universal tendency to decay. This tendency appears, and often fatally, in its earliest existence, and at every succeeding stage of its progress. It is however most visible and affecting after it has passed the middle point of life. Then decay arrests it in many forms, and with irresistible power: then the limbs gradually stiffen; the faculties lose their vigour; the strength declines; the face becomes overspread with wrinkles; and the head with the locks of age. Health, at the same time, recedes by degrees, even from the firmest constitution; pains multiply; feebleness and languor lay hold on the whole system; and death at length seizes the frame as his prey, and changes it to corruption and to dust.

A mighty and glorious difference will be made in our nature, when the body revives beyond the grave. All the evils and accidents which befal it in the present world, will then have lost their power. Hunger, thirst, weakness, declension, death, and corruption, are bounded by the tomb. Those who rise to the resurrection of life, *will hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat.* Firm, enduring, unassailable by distress, and proof against the undermining progress of years, they will, *like gold tried in the fire,* remain bright, and indestructible, through the endless succession of ages.

2. *The body will be raised immortal.*

When this corruptible, says St. Paul, *shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal immortality.*

Incorruption and immortality are attributes so nearly allied, as not easily to be separated in our discussions. Still they are only kindred attributes, not the same. An incorruptible body, although it cannot perish by decay and dissolution, may yet be annihilated. An immortal body will know no end, either from its own weakness or from external power. Such God has been pleased to constitute the bodies of his children beyond the grave. Death to them shall be no more. In defiance of time, and superior to injury, the body will *live with him for ever and ever.*

3. *The body will be raised in power.*

It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power: ver. 43.

In the future world the righteous serve *God day and night in his temple,* Rev. vii. 15: that is, they serve him without cessation or rest; and need of course faculties fitted for the performance of these services; faculties whose vigour the magnitude of no duty shall overcome, and no continuance of action, fatigue or impair. Originally destined for an existence of this nature, the powers of the body will correspond with the activity of the mind; and will sustain, without injury, defect, or decay, and will accomplish with enjoyment, growing out of its exertions, every labour which it is required to undergo. Instead of being exhausted or weakened, it seems evident from the Scriptures, that its strength, as well as its other attributes, will, like those of the mind, advance towards a higher and higher perfection throughout the ages of eternity.

4. *The body will, at the resurrection, be endued with great activity.*

In Luke xx. 36, our Saviour declares that the righteous will in the ἀναστασις, or future state of existence, be ἰσαγγελοι; literally, *equal to the angels;* but perhaps intended here to denote, *like the angels;* that is, possessing, in a near and kindred degree, the attributes which they possess. Accordingly, in the fourth chapter of the Apocalypse, we are taught, that the four-and-twenty elders, the representatives of the ancient and modern churches, are placed round about the throne, together with the four living ones, the representatives of the angelic host. The resemblance here exhibited is such as strongly to exemplify this declaration of Christ. Their station is substantially the same: their employments are the same.

The activity of angels is disclosed to us by the Scriptures in many passages, and in language of the greatest force. The ninth chapter of Daniel particularly contains, as I observed in the first discourse concerning these glorious intelligences, a remarkable illustration of this subject. Here we are told, that Gabriel received a command in heaven, while Daniel was employed in prayer to interpret his vision; and that, *being caused to fly swiftly, he touched Daniel about the time of the evening oblation.* The activity

here declared is plainly superior both to conception and calculation; and exceeds that of the sun-beams beyond any proportion perceptible by our minds. Similar to this representation will be the activity of the righteous in the future world.

To recur to the illustration adopted in the former part of this discourse; we are now, as we are styled in the Scriptures, worms of the dust; slowly and humbly creeping upon the earth appointed for our habitation. With these reptiles we die, and are lost in the tomb. Like them also we shall revive to a new and nobler existence, and wander freely at our pleasure through regions, shut to us hitherto by an immoveable law of our nature, and to our apprehension existing only in argument or fancy.

To act is the end of all rational existence, and *to act at pleasure* the necessary concomitant of happy existence. Like Moses and Elias, if we obtain a part in the first resurrection, we may hereafter visit distant worlds with incomparably more ease than we can now pass from one continent to another, and find the oceans of space by which they are separated merely means of illustrating our activity, and furnishing delightful opportunities of expatiating at our pleasure.

5. *As all these attributes united are a complete establishment of endless youth, the body, at the resurrection, will of course be invested with this delightful characteristic.*

On this subject it will be unnecessary to dwell, after what has been already said. I shall only observe, that the angels, who appeared to Mary and the apostles after the resurrection of Christ, were, although created many thousand years before, still young, and were regarded by them at first as being young men. On *them* duration makes in this respect no impression. Ages roll their years away, and leave them as they found them in the blossom of youth, which shall begin for ever. Such is the character of all the children of God beyond the grave.

6. *The body will, at the resurrection, be arrayed in glory and beauty.*

It is sown in dishonour, says St. Paul, *it is raised in glory,* ver. 43. *Who shall change our vile body,* says the same apostle, *and fashion it like unto his glorious body, ac-*

cording to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself. In stricter language, *Who shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation, that it may become of the like form with his glorious body, according to the energy whereby he is able also to subdue all things unto himself.*

On the mount of transfiguration, Christ appeared to Peter, James, and John, in his glorious body; then, as we are told by the evangelists, *his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment became white and glistering.* In Rev. i. 9, we have a more ample exhibition of the same illustrious object; in some respects emblematical, but in all sublime and glorious beyond a parallel. *And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks, and in the midst of the golden candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle. His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were as a flame of fire; and his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters; and he had in his right hand seven stars, and out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword; and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.* Of the supreme splendour of this appearance, how high must our conceptions rise, when we hear the apostle subjoin, *And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead.* In this wonderful change, St. Paul observes, there shall be a display of *energy*, that is, of power and skill, like that by which *he subdues all things unto himself.* What a transformation must that be which this poor, frail, perishable body will experience, when the full import of this prediction shall be accomplished! How exceedingly is such a change to be coveted by beings like ourselves, subject as we are to pain and disease, decay and death!

7. *The body raised will be a spiritual body.*

It is sown, says St. Paul, *a natural or animal body, it is raised a spiritual body: there is a natural (or animal) body; there is a spiritual body.*

By *an animal body* is intended, as you well know, *the present body of man;* depending for its continuance upon the principle of animal life, the subject of innumerable frailties, and making a regular progress to dissolution.

Of *a spiritual body*, it is not perhaps in our power to form an adequate conception. Some of the ancient fathers supposed it to be a body which, having no need of the animal functions, was preserved in life by the mere inhabitation of the mind. This opinion, I presume, they derived from the phrase only, and not from any scriptural declaration.

In the view of St. Paul, this subject was plainly of high importance, for he insists on it in a fervent and sublime strain in several of the following verses. After declaring that there is a spiritual body as well as an animal one, he illustrates the declaration by observing, that *the first Adam was made a living soul, the last a quickening spirit; that the first was of the earth, earthy; the second, the Lord from heaven; that they who are earthy are like the earthy Adam, and they who are heavenly like the heavenly Adam;* and that, *as we have borne the image of the earthy, so we shall bear the image of the heavenly.* He then declares, that *flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.* Hence he observes, that *those who are alive at* the sounding of the last trumpet, must necessarily undergo a change of the same nature with that which the dead will experience, and which he has described in the preceding part of the chapter. From these observations it may, I think, be asserted without danger of error, in the

First place, *That the body raised will not be composed of flesh and blood.*

Secondly, *That it will in its nature possess powers of life totally superior to those which we now possess,* being destined to resemble, in this respect, *the quickening spirit* whose image it will bear.

Thirdly, *That none of its organs will prove temptations to sin,* as in the present world, *but all of them aids to holiness;* this circumstance being often, in the Scriptures, the professed distinction between that which is natural or animal, and that which is spiritual.

Fourthly, *That its organs of perception, and of enjoyment also, will possess a far higher and nobler nature than those with which we are now furnished.* Like Moses and Elias, the glorified man may be able, without danger of

mistake, to direct his way from the highest heavens to the distant regions of the universe.

Fifthly, *That generally the attributes of the body will so resemble those of the mind, as to render the epithet spiritual the proper description of its nature.* Like the mind, it may not without probability contain inherently the principles of life, and the seeds of immortality.

REMARKS.

1. *In this account of the resurrection, we have one specimen of the consistency exhibited in the gospel between different parts of the Christian system.*

The gospel every where discloses to us illustrious things concerning the future happiness and glory of the mind; and at the same time teaches us, that it will be reunited to the body in the future world. The least reflection will convince us, that such bodies as we now possess, must be very unsuitable mansions for minds destined to be thus glorious and happy. The mind is prepared to dwell in a palace. Such a body as ours could only become its prison. The uncouthness, the deformity, suggested when only so much of the scheme is brought before our eyes, is here delightfully done away. Here we learn that the body shall be fitted to become the habitation of a sanctified and immortal mind, and prove to it a most useful and delightful companion throughout eternity. Here we learn, that the body will be suited to all the perceptions, labours, enjoyments, and glories, of the mind; and that the mind, in the possession of this residence, will become greater, more useful, and more happy. Thus this part of the system is exactly proportioned to the rest, and strongly illustrative of the wisdom and goodness of its Author.

2. *The doctrine of the resurrection is a doctrine of revelation only.*

Of this doctrine not a trace can be found in all the investigations of philosophy. Paul, when declaring it to the Athenian philosophers, was pronounced by them to be a babbler. It was therefore a doctrine unknown and unheard of within the purlieus of their science. No philo-

sepher to that time had been so fortunate as to light upon it by accident, nor so ingenious as to derive it from reason. Indeed it must be acknowledged to lie beyond the reach of reason; and, in its very nature, to be hidden from the most scrutinizing human inquiry. The resurrection itself is an event depending absolutely on the will, as well as on the power, of God; and what he will choose to do with respect to this subject, no being but himself can determine.

Yet no doctrine devised by philosophy concerning man, is so sublime, so delightful, or so fitted to furnish consolation and hope to beings whose life in this world is a moment, and whose end is the grave. To this dark and desolate habitation, man, by the twilight of nature, looks forward in despair at his final home. All who have gone before him, have pointed their feet to its silent chambers; and not one of them returned to announce that an opening has been discovered from their dreary residence to some other more lightsome and more desirable region. His own feet daily tread the same melancholy path. As he draws nigh, he surveys its prison walls, and sees them unassailable by force, and insurmountable by skill. No lamp illumines the midnight within. No crevice opens to the eye a glimpse of the regions which lie beyond. In absolute despair he calls upon philosophy to cheer his drooping mind; but he calls in vain. She has no consolations for herself, and can therefore administer none to *him.* "Here," she coldly and sullenly cries, "is the end of man. From nothing he sprang; to nothing he returns. All that remains of him is the dust, which here mingles with its native earth."

At this sullen moment of despair, revelation approaches, and, with a command at once awful and delightful, exclaims, *Lazarus, come forth!* In a moment the earth heaves, the tomb discloses, and a form bright as the sun, and arrayed in immortality, rises from the earth; and, stretching its wings towards heaven, loses itself from the astonished sight.

3. *These considerations teach us, to entertain the highest apprehensions concerning the future glory of the mind.*

Of how little value, even in our own view, are the earthy, frail, perishable bodies! Yet what great and delightful things are to be done for them at the resurrection. What then must we suppose will be the future allotments of the mind, in its nature imperishable and eternal. The future glory of the body, as revealed in the Scriptures, outruns all the efforts of the human imagination. How *exceedingly abundantly above all that we are able to ask or think*, will the mind be exalted, adorned, and enraptured, by him, whose glory and delight it is to bless, and who has already instamped it with his own image, loveliness, and beauty.

6. *We learn from these considerations, the true way of providing for the welfare of our bodies.*

The human frame is here shewn to possess an incalculable value in the distinction to which it is entitled beyond the grave. If therefore we love our bodies, and desire to preserve and cherish them; we shall with the most effectual care secure their revival to all that distinction, and the happiness with which it is connected. This is to be accomplished, not by adorning and pampering them here, in obedience to the calls of pride and luxury; but by seeking effectually the immortal life of those minds by which they are inhabited. The body necessarily follows the destination of the mind. He therefore who gains a title to endless life, makes complete provision for the welfare of the whole man. In the Christian system all good is united; our duty and our interest, the well-being of the soul and that of the body, the blessings of time and those of eternity. He therefore who neglects the life of the soul, casts away his present good; he who refuses to do his duty squanders his all.

SERMON CLXVI.

THE REMOTER CONSEQUENCES OF DEATH.

THE FINAL JUDGMENT.

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night.—2 PET. III. 10.

IN the three preceding discourses I have considered *death; its immediate consequences;* and *the first of its remoter consequences;* to wit, *the resurrection.* I shall now proceed to the consideration of another of these consequences; to wit, *the general judgment.*

The day consecrated to this great transaction, is in the text styled *the day of the Lord.* The Christian sabbath is in the 118th Psalm, said to be *the day which the Lord hath made;* and is called in the first chapter of the Apocalypse, *the Lord's day.* On that day Christ arose from the dead, finished the work of redemption, and *rested from his labours, as God did from his.* In honour of this wonderful event, Christ consecrated the first day of the week for ever to himself, as a season of public religious worship to all the nations of men. On this day he has ever been peculiarly present with all his followers, and *commanded the blessing* to descend upon Zion, *even life for evermore.*

But the day mentioned in the text is *his day* in a still higher and more solemn sense. It is selected from all the days of time as the sabbath from those of the week.

It is the final day; the period of this earthly system; the dying day of this great world; on which its last groans will be heard, its knell sounded through the universe, and its obsequies celebrated with most awful pomp, and supreme as well as melancholy grandeur.

It is the day of universal judgment; on which the personal concerns of angels and of men will be brought to the last trial, before *the Judge of the quick and dead,* and irreversibly settled for eternity.

It is the day in which the mystery will be finished. All the wonderful and perplexing events of Providence towards this world, will at this time be explained to the full conviction of the assembled universe; so that God will appear *just when he judges, and clear when he condemns.* The secrets of the human heart, the mazes of Providence, and the wonders of the divine character, displayed in these events, will be unfolded in such a manner as to *stop every mouth* and murmur for ever.

It is the day on which the catastrophe of this earthly system will arrive. The plot immensely great and wonderful, comprising innumerable important scenes, and an endless variety of actors, will now be unravelled. The theatre is a world; the duration of the action is time; the actors are all the millions of the race of Adam; the subject is redemption; the hero is the Messiah; the end is the final triumph of virtue, and the irrevocable overthrow of sin. The catastrophe on this day will be completed and disclosed; and all the efforts, windings, and intricacies, find their termination. "IT IS DONE," will be proclaimed by the divine Herald to the universe; and the curtain will be drawn for ever.

It is the day on which Christ will be glorified. In this world he appeared as a man, humbled, persecuted, suffering, dying, nailed to the cross, and buried in the grave. Now he will descend from heaven *with the glory of his Father;* and *will come to be admired, by all them that believe,* with wonder and reverence inexpressible. No more the babe of Bethlehem; no more a prisoner before a human judge; no more an expiring victim on the cross; no more a lifeless corpse in the sepulchre; he will sit upon the throne of the universe, invested with the sceptre of infinite dominion. He will judge both angels and men; dispose of all nations at his pleasure; and open and shut both heaven and hell. Eternity to all beings will now be suspended on his nod; and life and death, which will know no end, will be conveyed by his voice. All beings will be *as nothing before him; and will be justly counted unto him as less than nothing and vanity.* He will speak, and it will be done: he will command, and it will stand for ever.

On this day, he will glorify his justice in the sight of the

universe. He will shew beyond denial to the consciences of impenitent beings, that their ruin was derived from themselves; that their sin is just as evil and odious, as he has declared it to be in the Scriptures; and that it is equitably *punished with everlasting destruction from his presence, and the glory of his power.*

On this day, he will glorify his kindness in the deliverance of all his followers from guilt and perdition. His compassion to this ruined world; his overflowing mercy to them who believed in him, chose him as their Saviour, and obeyed his voice; will now be manifested with supreme and eternal splendour. The universe will perceive, that he chose them as his own with perfect propriety: while they with astonishment and rapture will remember *the love with which he loved them, and gave himself for them;* the tenderness with which he preserved them from temptations and enemies; the affection with which he still bears them on his heart; and the divine promises, which while they lived in the present world, conveyed to them immortal life, and are now to be fulfilled in a manner which no eye hath seen, and no mind conceived.

On this day he will glorify his omniscience. He will shew, that from the beginning *he hath searched the hearts and tried the reins of all the children of men.* The sins which they have committed, the virtues which they have exercised, the motives by which they have been governed, and the rewards which will constitute an equitable retribution for their various conduct, he will *set in the light of his countenance;* as objects intended to be clearly seen, are by ourselves placed in the sun-beams. It will then appear, that he *knew all his works from the beginning;* and is that ocean of knowledge, whence innumerable streams have flowed, and will for ever flow, to his intelligent creatures.

On this day he will glorify his immutability. Now he will clearly discover, that he is *Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.* Truth, the moral immutability of his character, will be found to have been the only language of his word; of his law, his promises, and his threatenings; of the system of redemption, and of the terms on which it is proffered to man. Of course, the universe will distinctly see how wisely his followers have trusted in

him, and how foolishly sinners have refused to believe his declarations.

Finally, *On this day he will glorify his power.* The most awful and convincing evidence will be furnished, that he *has the keys of death and of hades.* Heaven, at his command, will open all its infinite blessings to the eternal enjoyment of his children; and the doors of hell, at his bidding, will close on its guilty and miserable inhabitants. *None will be able to stay his hand, or* dare to *say unto him, What doest thou? From his face the heavens and the earth will flee away;* and at his word, *new heavens, and a new earth, wherein righteousness shall dwell* for ever, will spring up in their stead.

This awful day *will come as a thief in the night.* A thief comes in the hour of peace and security; when the house is defenceless, and the family buried in sleep. The first notice of his arrival is the sound of his breaking up, or the noise of his ravages. He comes also unexpectedly: he comes only to invade, distress, and destroy. In this unexpected and dreadful manner, *will the day of the Lord come.*

Mankind, according to the representations of St. John, will, at the period which precedes the final judgment, be sunk in degeneracy and pollution. The glorious effects of the millennium will have ceased; and the world returned to a degeneracy like that which existed immediately before the deluge. *The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life,* will have regained their full dominion over the human race; and religion prepared her final flight to her native heaven. Strong in their numbers, their power, and their pride; sunk in sense and profligacy; and burning with intense hatred to God and his children; the nations *who are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog,* will be *gathered together to battle* against the Christians remaining in the world; will *go up on the breadth of the earth; and compass the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city.* Exulting in the fullest confidence of their final extinction, this army of *scoffers* will exclaim with triumphant insolence, *Where is the promise of his coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.* In this night of stupidity and sin, this season of spiritual slumber, the final

day will arrive. In a moment it will burst on the astonished world; break the last sleep with alarm and terror; and strip guilty men of all their beloved enjoyments, and all their fond hopes of future good.

The ancient Christians believed, that the declaration in the text would be literally accomplished. Nor is there any proof that their interpretation was erroneous. There is no improbability, that the sun, which hid its face at the crucifixion of the Redeemer, will again retire from this stupendous scene; or that the moon and *stars* will *withdraw their shining*, and leave the world in deep and melancholy darkness. In this case the morning of the great day will be ushered in, not by the cheerful twilight spread over the mountains, but the awful approach of that intense splendour surrounded by which the Son of God will descend. A new and terrible light will appear in mid-heaven; and advancing towards the earth, will diffuse such a morning over all its regions, as the universe has never beheld, and will never behold again.

At this momentous period, *the trumpet of God will sound*, as it once sounded when the same glorious person descended upon Mount Sinai; while all the people who were in the camp trembled. At this renewed sound all nations will tremble; and the earth quake to its utmost shores.

At the same period, *the archangel will call to the dead;* and awaken them from the long sleep in which they have been buried. The earth and the ocean *will give up the dead which are in them.* The regions of death, and the world of departed spirits, *will give up the dead which are in them.* Every grave will open, its dust be reanimated, and living forms be seen rising from its dark chambers over all the surface of the globe. Those who are still alive, will also undergo substantially the same great change which has been before undergone by those who have been dead; and both will be invested with bodies incorruptible and immortal. The globe will be repeopled in a moment; and the whole family of Adam, with their progenitor at their head, will stand up together.

This vast assembly will be divided into two great classes; *the righteous and the wicked.* The former will *rise to the resurrection of life;* and the latter *will rise to the resurrec-*

tion of damnation. The righteous *will lift up their heads* with exultation and transport; and *behold their redemption drawing nigh.* Their fears will now be end ed; their dangers overcome; their enemies subdued; their sins washed away; and their reward be ready to begin its eternal progress. The wicked on the contrary will rise with full conviction, that in *their lifetime they have received all their good things.* Time; the world; the gratifications of pride, avarice, and sensuality; the combinations of evil men; the courage and strength which they have derived from their numbers; their contempt, hatred, and persecution, of good men; and all the bright prospects, which they have cherished of success in sin; have retired behind them to return no more. The day of enjoyment and of hope is passed for ever. The day of retribution is come. The Lord of all things, whom they have so often and so obstinately disbelieved, despised, and crucified afresh, is now approaching to take *vengeance on all them who* in this world *knew not God, and obeyed not the gospel of his Son.* With supreme dismay and anguish, *they will call to the rocks and mountains to fall on them, and hide them from the the wrath of the Lamb.*

This divine Person will now be seen descending from heaven, *in the glory of his* FATHER, in *his own* peculiar *glory, and with all his holy angels.* The Shechinah, in which he so often manifested himself to his ancient church, and in which he ascended after his resurrection, will now surround him with an interchange of the deepest darkness, and light inaccessible. *His eyes as a flame of fire, his countenance as the sun shineth in his strength, and his voice as the sound of many waters,* will fill all virtuous beings with wonder, awe, and delight, and all sinful ones with amazement and horror.

Around him, with supreme veneration and transport, *the innumerable company of angels* will send *a shout* of triumph to the distant regions of the universe; and the happy millions of the righteous re-echo from this world the joyful acclamation.

To meet him, his faithful followers *will be caught up* by divine power, and their own instinctive energy; and rise *as an* immense *cloud through the air,* to be placed in open,

distinguished honour *at his right hand.* They were not *ashamed of him* in this world; and he will thus gloriously prove, that *he* is *not ashamed of them* in the day of trial. Here *they* publicly and steadfastly *confessed him before men,* as their Saviour. There *he will confess them* before the universe, as his chosen, faithful, and beloved followers.

When the throne of judgment is set, and the books opened; *the wicked will be summoned to his left hand;* as a public proof of his indignation against their guilty character. To their view, as well as to that of the righteous, will rise up in clear remembrance, with unerring discernment, and in the most rapid succession, all the events of their earthly being. The sins of both, the proffers of mercy made in the gospel, the unbelief and impenitence of the wicked, and the faith and repentance of the righteous, will now *be set in order before their eyes.* With a clear and comprehensive glance of thought, sinners will behold the vast picture of life drawn only in black, with no bright and luminous strokes to relieve the distressed eye. The righteous, on the contrary, will see their sins washed away in the blood of Christ; their souls sanctified by the Spirit of grace; and their services accepted as *well done,* because they were rendered with a spirit of sincere obedience, and with faith in the Redeemer.

To the righteous he will then say, *Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in; naked, and ye clothed me; I was sick, and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye came unto me.* To the wicked he will say, *Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me not in; naked, and ye clothed me not; sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not.*

When the trial is ended, and the final allotments of angels and men are determined, flaming fire from the presence of the Judge will kindle this great world with a universal conflagration. All the works of man; his palaces, towers, and

temples; his villages, towns, and cities; his wonderful displays of art; his haughty piles of grandeur; and his vast labours of defence and dominion; will be lighted up in a single blaze, and vanish from the creation.

Nor will the desolation be limited to the works of men. The earth on which they stand; the hills and mountains, the valleys and plains; the lakes, the rivers, and the ocean; will all in a moment become one blazing ruin. *The* very *elements* of which they are composed will *melt with fervent heat;* and the world itself, so long the seat of sin and sorrow, be finally destroyed.

The visible heavens in the mean time will catch the flame. Above, beneath, around, a vast concave of fire will encircle this dissolving globe; and *with a great noise,* an awful sound filling the universe, both *the* inferior *heavens* and *the earth will flee away from the face of him that sitteth on the throne; and no place be found for them any more.*

From this scene of destruction, the Judge, together with all his happy followers; the angels, who have faithfully ministered to him, and the saints who have loved and believed in him; will ascend to the heaven of heavens; where he will present them before his Father, as his own friends and children, the crown and reward of all his labours in the work of redemption. By him they will be approved, accepted, and blessed, for ever,

The wicked, at the same time, will descend to the regions of woe; and begin and pursue the melancholy journey of their future being in an unceasing course of sin and sorrow for ever.

REMARKS.

1. *How rational and harmonious a system of the divine conduct is presented to us in the Scriptures!*

This wonderful volume exhibits to us the Former and Ruler of the universe, as self-existent, eternal, independent, omnipresent, and immutable; and as possessed of all power, knowledge, and goodness. This great and wonderful being, they inform us, in the beginning created with a command the earth and the heavens; and peopled them with angels and men. Of the angels, they declare, some fell from their allegiance to the Ruler of all things; and were turned out of heaven into the region of woe:

while others, who persevered in their duty, are continued in the glorious possession of that happy world for ever. Man, created perfectly holy, they also teach us, apostatized from this character, and from obedience to his Creator. The proofs of this melancholy event are complete; and exist equally within us and without.

To deliver him from this evil condition, God, we are farther told, provided wise and ample means of restoration; means most happily suited to the character of man as a moral agent, and of his Maker as the moral governor of the universe. He sent his Son to atone for human guilt; and his Spirit by a mysterious agency to renew the human soul. At the same time, and by the inspiration of the same Spirit, he gave his word to enlighten the mind by his instructions, to control it by his precepts, to allure it by his promises, and to alarm it by his threatenings. The conditions of its restoration are there declared to be, *repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ.* No conditions could be more suited to his perfection; or to the character, or the wants of man. They are obvious; they are reasonable; they are necessary; they are efficacious. Without them, man could neither be virtuous, useful, nor happy. Towards the attainment of them, he has also provided, in his word and ordinances, advantages of the most desirable nature.

When the end of this scheme of Providence shall arrive, and all the generations of Adam shall be completed, he has appointed a day on which he will in righteousness judge both angels and men by his beloved Son, whom he has ordained to this mighty office. All their conduct will then be examined; and their endless allotments apportioned to them severally *according to their works.* How obvious and perfect a consistency is displayed throughout every part of this scheme! The end proposed is exactly suited to the character given of the proposer; and is no other than the establishment of an immense kingdom, *of the increase of whose prosperity and peace there shall be no* termination. The means adopted for this accomplishment are entirely fitted for this purpose; and are accordant parts of a perfect whole.

Nor is this exhibition less remarkable for its splendour

than for its harmony. An immeasurable grandeur, a divine magnificence, invest it every where; and write upon all its parts, the name of the city seen in vision by Ezekiel, "JEHOVAH IS HERE." In comparison with it, the highest conceptions of philosophy and poetry are the babblings of children. Moses and Isaiah, Paul and John, hold their course among the stars: while Homer and Virgil, Plato and Cicero, creep on the earth beneath them. The opening of this wonderful scheme is the creation of the universe, its progress is constituted by the mediation of the Son of God, and the long train of prophecies with which he was ushered into the world; the establishment of the church, and the host of miracles by which it was preserved and blessed; its extension over the known world by the apostles; its sufferings from antichristian persecution; and its supreme glory and prosperity throughout the millennium; together with all the changes and revolutions of time which have been connected with these illustrious events. Its end is the resurrection of the dead, the judgment of angels and men, the conflagration of the earth and the heavens, and the endless retribution of the righteous and the wicked. For such an exhibition, no mind uninspired could suffice:

2. *What an illustrious proof is here furnished of the Deity of Christ!*

This glorious Person informs us, that *the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son.* On this awful day, the wonderful commission will be executed. On this day, the Son will be seated upon the throne of the universe, and hold the sceptre of infinite dominion. On this day he will shew, that *all authority in heaven and in earth* is in his possession; that *he searches the hearts* and *tries the reins* of all intelligent beings; and that their endless destiny is suspended on his pleasure. No other specimen of the divine agency, no other exhibition of the divine character, will in glory and greatness be equal to this: none, I mean, of which the tidings have reached the present world. Omniscience will never be so displayed. There will never be so awful or affecting a display of omnipotence. Wisdom, justice, goodness, and truth, will never be so divinely illustrated, as in the allotments of the righteous and the

wicked. In a word, the divine character will be glorified here in a manner unrivalled at any preceding period; and Christ, in his own person and office, will appear as God, with such splendour and majesty as were never seen before, and will never be seen again.

3. *What different views will at this period be formed of moral things, from those which are usually entertained by men in the present world!*

How differently will mankind think concerning their own favourite pursuits in this life. What views will the miser, just risen from the grave, and fixing his eye with astonishment and terror on the Judge, awfully descending through the heavens, form concerning the devotion of his life and labours to the accumulation of gold! What is the value of that gold now? How wonderful will it seem, that he could lose his probation and his soul in the pursuit of money! With what emotions will the ambitious man look back on the power and place for which he bartered his salvation; and on the fraud, slander, and falsehood, with which he depressed his rivals, and elevated himself to distinction! How will the votary of sense roll back his eyes to the scenes of sloth, luxury, and lewdness, to the tables of festivity, drunkenness, and gluttony, at which he corrupted his soul, and converted it into a house of pollution, incapable of becoming a habitation of the Holy Spirit! In what manner will the devotee of amusement survey the dance, the song, the party of pleasure, the festival, and the theatre, which allured the mind away from God, and turned the feet out of the path to heaven! With what a change of opinion will the sophist regard the books and the conversation in which he laboured to seduce his fellow-men from piety; to withdraw their thoughts from religion; to awaken suspicions of the gospel, and distrust of the Redeemer; to lull them asleep in security and impenitence; and to beget in them a final oblivion of the soul and its welfare, of the judgment and eternity! How will he now regard his ingenuity, his false arguments, his successful struggles against truth, and his triumphs over its friends! How will the soul of the impenitent sinner feel on this occasion, while recalling to its remembrance all its former attempts to support itself in

unbelief and hardness of heart! Whither will be fled its mockery at sin; its bold profanations of *that glorious and fearful name, the Lord its God;* the contempt which it has cast upon its Redeemer; its ridicule of things sacred; and its hatred of religion, and the religious! What apprehensions will it now entertain concerning its former jests, which it gaily uttered upon the Scriptures, the sabbath, and the sanctuary; upon the worship of God, the threatenings of his law, the warnings of his providence, and the invitations of his grace! With what emotions will it call to mind its contempt of heaven, and its disregard of hell!

4. *What a mighty change will this event produce in the universe!*

Our Saviour has taught us, *that many who are last will be first, and that many who are first will be last.* On this solemn day the declaration will begin to be wonderfully accomplished. On this day, those who were *wise men after the flesh,* whose talents astonished mankind, and whose researches entailed on them the admiration and applause of a world, will descend from their envied elevation to contempt and infamy; and see raised incalculably above them, the lowly, ignorant, and despised Christian, who believed and obeyed that *preaching of the cross,* which in this world they esteemed the most despicable folly. The monarch who in the present life was served, flattered, and idolized by his courtiers, and regarded by the millions whom he governed only with awe and terror, will here find his power and splendour, the pride of distinction, and the incense of homage, vanished for ever; and himself depressed lower than was in this world the meanest wretch who shrunk from his nod, or lived upon his smile: while that very wretch perhaps has now cast off all his former attire of debasement and suffering, and risen to distinction and glory inexpressible. Here the hero, the foster-child of fame, the conqueror of realms, the murderer of nations, and the plunderer of a world, will see himself poor beyond the poorest, low beneath the lowest, and despised more than the most despicable; powerless, sunk, and miserable, in a degree outrunning conception. His misery will be mightily enhanced also by the sight of multitudes whom in this world he

trampled in the mire, tortured, butchered, and gave to be food for the fowls of heaven, looking down upon him from a height to which he never raised his imagination, and commencing the possession of dignity and enjoyment to which no limit is prescribed. Generally, *there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth*, such as this world never saw, when the rich, the splendid, the polished, and the noble, behold the clown, the beggar, and the slave, *sitting down in the kingdom of God, with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and themselves thrust out*.

At the same time it is to be remembered, that these will not be the only disappointments undergone at this awful period. The rich, the learned, and the great, will not be condemned, because they possessed wealth, knowledge, or power; but for the measures by which they acquired these possessions, or the unworthy use which they made of them. Nor will the poor and lowly be accepted on account of their poverty, their ignorance, or their rusticity; but for the disposition which they experienced, and the manner in which they conducted themselves, in these humble circumstances. Wherever this has not been their disposition and their conduct, they too will be rejected. Virtue and sin exist in the heart; and are never necessarily connected with our external condition. Let the rich consider how dreadful a contrast it will be to have been opulent in this world, and to be in want of all things beyond the grave. Let the poor remember, how deplorable must be the condition of being poor, despised, and wretched, here; merely as a prelude to endless poverty, contempt, and misery, in the world to come.

Nor will the changes be less affecting which will exist among those who in the present life were found on the same level. Were we to select a single neighbourhood, and go with our inquiries from house to house; what mighty alterations in their relative condition, what affecting terminations of their former friendly intercourse, would be presented to the eye even of the most expansive charity! In what an affecting manner would the wealth and poverty, the reputation and disgrace, the enjoyment and the suffering, be exchanged! To what a height would those, who here are in the most lowly circumstances, begin in many

instances to rise on this awful day! To what a depth those who are the most prosperous begin to fall!

Still more affecting, more full of disappointment and anguish, will be the distinctions made in families. There will be instances in which the parents will ascend to glory inexpressible, accompanied sometimes by none, sometimes by one, sometimes by two, sometimes by three, and, it is to be hoped and believed, sometimes by all their happy offspring. At other times, the parents themselves will be left behind; and, with failing eyes and broken hearts, will follow their children rising to the heavens, and bidding them an everlasting farewell. Such will be, such in some respects has already been, the separation between Jeroboam and his son Abijah. Brethren and sisters also, mutually and unspeakably beloved here, and such of them as were devoted to sin, warned, reproved, and borne to heaven on the wings of prayer, by those who consecrated themselves to God, will be parted asunder to meet no more. No longer brothers and sisters, but strangers and aliens, some of them will be vessels of mercy, usefulness, and honour, in the house of their Father; and others vessels of wrath in the mansions of woe.

Most distressing of all: husbands and wives, here united in the nearest of all earthly relations, and in the tenderest of all human attachments, will there not unfrequently be seated, one on the right hand, and the other on the left. One will ascend with the Judge to the world of glory; the other, lost in the host of evil beings, go down to the regions of despair. One will advance in wisdom, worth, and joy, throughout endless ages; the other make a dreadful and melancholy progress in guilt and sorrow for ever.

5. *How will sinners be amazed when they awake out of the grave, and see all these things come to pass!*

They will then behold Christ really come to jud ment; the day of retribution actually arrived, and the declarations of the Scriptures literally fulfilled. They will see the graves rent asunder, and themselves raised from the dead. They will hear *the voice of the archangel, and the trump of God.* The rocks around them will be rent; the mountains fall; and the earth heave with its final agonies. Over their

heads the heavens will be filled with the hosts of angels, and the glory of the Messiah. At their side the righteous, and among them their own beloved friends, their parents, husbands, wives, children, brothers, and sisters, will be arrayed in immortal beauty, and *caught up to meet the Lord in the air.* With what bitterness of soul will they call to *the hills to fall on them, and to the mountains to cover them from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his majesty.*

6. *How delightful and glorious will be the assembly of the righteous on this day!*

The endless multitude of the first-born will, on this day, *in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump,* burst the grave, and stand upon their feet: their *bodies fashioned like unto Christ's glorious body,* and their souls informed with immortal life: their *faces will shine as the sun, and their raiment be white and glistering.* There are countenances in this world, which when united with fine forms, and composed of superior features, when animated with intelligence, and moulded by peculiar virtue into the clear and strong expression of worth and loveliness, fascinate the eye, and engross the heart. What then must be the appearance of that aspect, which is wrought into harmony, beauty, and dignity, by the most exquisite workmanship of God, inspired with the intelligence of heaven, and lighted with the beams of angelic excellence; around which virtue plays with immortal radiance; while joy illumines the eye with living splendour, and glory surrounds the head with its crown of stars. In this manner will be arrayed, in this manner adorned, *a multitude, which no man can number, of all nations, kindreds, and tongues.* How delightful, how astonishing, must it be, to behold this vast assembly rising from the tomb, throughout every part of the habitable world; and ascending, as by one instinctive impulse, to meet their divine Redeemer, and to be welcomed to the seat of approbation and honour at his right hand! Trace them one step farther. How magnificent, how sublime, how enrapturing, must be the prospect of these glorified beings, surrounding, after the judgment is terminated, the Lord of all things: and rising in his train, as a cloud of splendour, to

the mansions of eternal joy! This will be that *manifestation of the sons of God* so earnestly expected, as St. Paul informs us by the whole creation; the jubilee of the virtuous universe; the dawn of everlasting day.

7. *With all these solemn considerations in full view, let me exhort this audience to consider what manner of persons they ought to be in all holy conversation and godliness.*

This is the practical use made of the same subject by the apostle Peter; and certainly the best which can be made. Every Christian is most deeply interested in the exhortation. The most powerful of all motives here summon you, my brethren, to the great work of spiritual improvement. Lukewarm indeed must you be, sunk in sloth, and buried in sleep, if you do not feel yourselves roused by these awful things to diligence and vigour in the Christian life. Let me press upon you the indispensable duties of watching, striving, and praying, alway. Let me solemnly urge you with *all diligence to make your calling and election sure;* to resist temptation, and to overcome iniquity; to *fight the good fight, and* to *keep the faith;* that you *may finish your course with joy. Look* steadily *for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of the great God, even our Saviour Jesus Christ;* that *when he, who is the believer's life, shall appear, you may all appear with him in glory.*

But there are multitudes in this house whose lives furnish no testimony that they are children of God. How much more deeply still are these persons interested in this exhortation! When the blessed Redeemer of mankind *came preaching the kingdom of God,* he commanded all men everywhere to *repent and believe the gospel.* A thousand times has he repeated this command to you. Without faith in him, without repentance, without holiness, you cannot *abide* in this awful day. Remember then while life lasts, that this is all for which you live. How invaluable is this golden season; this accepted time; in which, if you hasten to the employment, you may *work out your salvation.* Far downward have you advanced in *the broad and crooked way which leads to destruction;* but the night of death has not overtaken you. Look upward; and you will see the Sun of righteousness still shines to illumine your path back to

life. Seize the inestimable moment; and flee for your lives, as Lot escaped from *the cities of the plain.*

To these all-important duties, Christ knew that your hearts *would be,* as you know they *are,* utterly opposed. That you might overcome this opposition, he has given you all the means of grace to become, under the blessing of his good Spirit, the means of your salvation. Feel then their immense importance; and seize and employ them with all possible earnestness and anxiety. Let no sabbath pass until it shall have blessed you. When the sanctuary opens its doors; let your *souls long, yea, even faint, for the courts of the Lord.* Let no sermon escape, without enlightening your minds, and amending your hearts. Every morning, and every evening, *bow your knees* in secret, before *the Father of all mercies;* and send up your cries to heaven for the salvation of your souls. Prize the word of life *more than the most fine gold;* and relish it more *than honey and the honey-comb. Seek for wisdom as for silver, and for understanding as for hidden treasure.*

To rouse yourselves every day to every effort for the attainment of eternal life, keep in perpetual view these amazing events. Of all the astonishing scenes which have been recited you will be witnesses. *You* will hear the call of the archangel, and rise from the grave. *You* will see the Judge descend; the judgment set; and the books opened. *You* will hear the sentence pronounced on the righteous, and on the wicked. *You* will ascend with your glorious Redeemer to the heaven of heavens; or be sent down, with evil men and evil angels, to the world of perdition.

Does not your *heart tremble at this?* Is it not moved out of its place? When *the mountains quake* at the approach of their Creator, and *the hills melt;* and *the earth is burnt at his presence; the world, and all that is therein; who can stand before his indignation: who abide in the fierceness of his anger?* What emotions will then be felt by every impenitent sinner! With what agonies will he sigh for the return of the accepted time! With what delirious ecstacy would his heart heave, to hear another day of grace, another opportunity of repentance, proclaimed by his Judge! But no day of grace will ever return to him. No voice of mercy will again announce the birth of a Saviour. The

doors of heaven will be opened no more. The smiles of a forgiving God will never dawn on the regions of sin and sorrow. Season will hasten after season, and age roll on after age, the melancholy round of darkness and despair, and not a beam of hope glimmer through the cheerless void, to revive the wearied and dying eye. *Oh that ye were wise; that ye understood these things; that ye would consider your latter end.*

SERMON CLXVII.

THE REMOTER CONSEQUENCES OF DEATH.

THE PUNISHMENT OF THE WICKED. ITS DURATION.

And these shall go away into everlasting punishment.
MATT. XXV. 46.

IN the last discourse, I gave an account of *the final judgment*, and of *the sentences pronounced upon the righteous and the wicked.* The next subjects of consideration are *their future allotments.* I shall first consider *that of the wicked.*

This subject naturally divides itself into two parts; *its nature and its duration.* The latter of these will be the subject of discourse at the present time.

In the text it is asserted, that *impenitent sinners shall go away into everlasting punishment.* Christians have very generally regarded this declaration of Christ as intending, in the strict sense, a punishment without end. But there have been multitudes of persons, styling themselves Christians, particularly in modern times, who have decided otherwise; and insisted, either that there will be no punishment beyond the grave, or that it will be temporary. In support of this opinion, and in opposition to that which has been generally received, they have advanced various arguments and objections which they professedly consider as having great weight, and to which apparently they yield their own as-

sent. A teacher of systematical theology seems obliged therefore to examine this subject; to meet such objections and arguments; and either to refute them, or to acknowledge that he is unable to answer them.

As the abettors of this scheme blend their objections and their direct arguments together: and as they are too numerous to be examined, in every instance separately, in a single sermon, I shall not feel myself obliged to discriminate very solicitously in this respect; but shall take the liberty to follow in some measure the path which my opposers have trodden.

Before I begin the investigation of this subject, I shall make a few observations, for the purpose of removing, or, if that cannot be done, of lessening, a prejudice (the strongest perhaps cherished by the human mind) against the doctrine in question. The subject is immeasurably awful, and beyond all others affecting. Few persons can behold it in near vision with a steady eye. The very preacher, who teaches the doctrine to others, cannot but know, unless certainly assured of his own salvation (a case undoubtedly very rare), that he may, at that very time, be alleging arguments which are to affect himself, and to evince his own final destruction, as well as that of others. If his heart is not made of stone, he cannot contemplate the subject, as it respects *his fellow-men*, without overwhelming amazement. The destiny of one immortal mind is an object, whose importance no finite thought can conceive, no numbers estimate. How vast must be this object, when the number of such minds becomes so great, as to reach the lowest limit to which the most enlarged charity will be compelled to extend it! How entirely overwhelmed must he be who contemplates it, when he remembers, and beholds a melancholy experience verify, the declaration of our Saviour, that *Wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be who go in thereat!*

At the same time the subject is unquestionably *perplexing*, as well as *distressing*. There are, I know, persons who speak concerning it with an air of cool self-complacency, as being, in their view, easy of investigation, and free from embarrassment. I am inclined, perhaps uncharitably, to give them little credit for candour, clearness of intellect, or

soundness of character; and greatly doubt whether the doctrine has been investigated by them, either to such an extent, or with such a spirit, as might furnish them with just views of its nature. There are others who discourse of it in the desk, in the phraseology, the style, and the utterance, belonging to vehement eloquence; such as we often find attached to a strain of powerful invective, or vigorous controversy. Something may here be allowed for the strong impulses of ardent minds; something to the influence, unhappy as it may be deemed, of controversial feelings; and something to mistaken apprehensions of duty. In this manner we may in some measure excuse, but cannot justify, this unfortunate conduct. Were such persons to remember that they may, at this very time, be pronouncing the final doom of their own parents, brothers, sisters, wives, children, and even of themselves; I cannot but believe, that their mode of address would be essentially changed; would lose all its violence and exaggeration; and would become deeply humble, solemn, and affectionate. Every preacher ought to remember, that the latter of these modes of addressing a congregation, on this subject, is incomparably better fitted to produce the best effects on those who hear him: while the former will usually terminate in awakening mere horror concerning the subject, and mere disgust at the preacher.

But painful and perplexing as this subject is, it is often exhibited in the word of God. Whatever doctrines *he* has declared concerning it are true; and unfold with absolute certainty a part of the future destiny of man. They cannot therefore fail of being supremely interesting to *us*. To know and to feel, their proper import, may be the very means of turning our feet into the path of life. To disbelieve them, or to be ignorant of them, can, on the other hand, be of no possible use to us; and may easily prove fatally injurious. Were there no escape from this dreadful allotment published to us during our probation; we might indeed as well remain in ignorance of the evils to which we were advancing. But as a knowledge of our danger may prove the most effectual means of our escape, the importance of gaining this knowledge cannot be measured.

The punishment of the wicked is, as you well know,

often asserted in the Scriptures to *be everlasting*, to *endure for ever*, and *for ever and ever*. The objectors whom I have mentioned insist, that all the words and phrases of this nature denote a limited duration; and are never used to signify an absolute eternity. The meaning of all language is to be learned only from those who use it. If the manner in which they understand it is clearly discoverable from their writings, we may by critical attention become possessed of its meaning: if not, we are left without a remedy. Let us therefore in the present case have recourse to the writers of the New Testament, the only persons from whom we can expect to derive explicit views concerning the subject in hand; that we may if possible determine this point in a satisfactory manner. It is to be observed then,

1. *That the words and phrases, which have been either mentioned or alluded to, appear to be used in the Scriptures, to denote the longest period of which the subject mentioned in each case is capable.*

In one instance the word *for ever* seems to signify merely a long period. *One generation passeth away, and another cometh, but the earth abideth for ever.* If the destruction of this world mentioned in the Scriptures denotes the annihilation of its atoms, as well as the ruin of its form and structure; then the earth can be said to abide for ever with a limited meaning only; to wit, that it will endure for a long time, compared with a period of a human generation. But if the elements are to survive this destruction, and become the materials of *the new earth, wherein righteousness shall dwell*, then the term is used in a literal sense, and denotes an endless duration.

In such other cases as I have observed, this word is employed *to denote the longest period of which the subject united with it is capable.* Thus *a servant for ever*, is a servant during the longest period in which he can be a servant; that is, during his life. *An ordinance for ever*, is an ordinance continuing through the longest time in which it can be an ordinance; that is, throughout the whole continuance of the dispensation of which it is a part; viz. *the Mosaic dispensation.*

In the same manner, *the everlasting hills*, and *the ever-*

lasting mountains, denote hills and mountains enduring throughout the longest possible period which is predicable of them; to wit, while the earth endures.

It will be observed, that I have here mentioned the English words and phrases, and not the corresponding ones of the original languages. The reason of this is, that so far as I know, the original words are acknowledged on all hands to be correctly translated.

But if these words, when applied to the continuance of things in the future world, are used in this manner, they unquestionably denote an absolute eternity. For with respect to these things, such a duration will then evidently be possible.

2. *The phrase, εις τους αιωνας των αιωνων, commonly rendered for ever and ever*, is used, *if I mistake not, eighteen times in the New Testament.* In fifteeni nstances it is applied to the continuance of the glory, perfections, government, and praise, of God. In one, Rev. xxii. 5, it is said of the righteous in the future world, that *they shall reign for ever and ever.* In one of the remaining two, it is said of the impenitent, that is, of those among them who worship the beast and his image, that *the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever.* In the remaining instance it is said of the devil, who deceived the nations, of the beast, and of the false prophet, that *in the lake of fire and brimstone, they shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.*

Now let me ask whether a man, even of moderate understanding, could be supposed to write with scrupulous integrity a system of theology, and employ this phrase sixteen times to denote an absolute eternity, and twice to denote that which was infinitely different: while these were the only instances in which the phrase was applied to a given subject, and that of immeasurable importance to those for whom he wrote. But if such a man cannot be supposed thus to use language, nor vindicate it when used in this manner, can such conduct be attributed safely to the Spirit of God?

3. *In the text the Greek word αιωνιος is applied to the future happiness of the righteous, and to the future misery of the wicked.*

On this application I have two remarks to make.

The first is, *that it is applied to both these subjects in exactly the same manner; without any mark or hint of a distinction in the use of the word.* Plainly therefore we are not warranted to suppose any such distinction, unless we are taught it elsewhere in the Scriptures.

It is to be remarked farther, that the same word is generally, and so far as I have observed always, applied in the same manner, without any appearance of an intentional distinction.

My second remark is this, that *the word is employed in the text to denote a duration which commences after what we commonly intend by time is ended.* If then a limitation is not found elsewhere; we shall be unwarranted, since it is used here in the absolute manner, to believe, that the duration which it expresses will have any limits. The longest duration which will then be possible; the longest which may be predicated of the enjoyments of the righteous, and the sufferings of the wicked, will certainly be eternal.

4. *The terms in which the sufferings of the impenitent are spoken of in other passages of Scripture, leave, so far as I can discern, no hope of their termination.*

The following examples will sufficiently illustrate this observation. In the Second Epistle of St. Peter, it is said of the wicked, that *they will utterly perish in their own corruption.* It cannot be denied, that the destruction spoken of in this passage is declared to be absolute, and must be either annihilation or eternal woe. But annihilation cannot be that long-continued suffering to which the abettors of the doctrine here opposed acknowledge the wicked to be consigned in the text.

In Mark ix. 43, the immediate means of suffering to the impenitent are styled by our Saviour, *the fire that never shall be quenched.*

In several passages of the Scriptures, particularly in the text, Dan. xii. 2, Matt. iii. 12, and xiii. 36, &c. the happiness of the righteous and the sufferings of the wicked are exhibited to us in what may be called a parallel manner; and yet no intimation is given, that the duration of the one will not be equally extended with that of the other.

In Mark xiv. 21, our Saviour says, *Woe to that man by*

whom the Son of man is betrayed. Good were it for that man that he had never been born. If Judas should be miserable through any limited duration, however long, and should afterward be happy through the eternity which would lie beyond it; this position must, with mathematical evidence, be seen to be untrue.

In Luke xvi. 25, the rich man is informed by Abraham, *that in his lifetime he had received his good things;* as Lazarus had *likewise received his evil things.* Lazarus had received all his evil things. The rich man must clearly I think be considered as having received all his good things. Especially will this be evident when we remember, that the declaration is made as a conclusive reason, why he could not receive a single drop of water, the only thing for which he asked.

In the 50th psalm, which seems plainly to be an account of the last judgment, we have in the twenty-second verse subjoined to this account the following awful monition, *Now consider this, ye that forget God; lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver.*

In Matt. xviii. 23, &c. we have the parable of *the servant who owed ten thousand talents, and had nothing to pay.* This servant his lord ultimately commanded to be thrown into prison, and there confined until he should pay the debt. How evident is it that this man could never pay the debt, and therefore must for ever remain in prison.

In John iii. 36 our Saviour says, *He that believeth not the Son shall not see life.* I can conceive of no language which could more effectually cut off every hope of the impenitent than this.

In Rev. xxi. 27 it is said, *There shall in nowise enter into it,* that is, into the heavenly city, *any thing that defileth, or worketh abomination, or that maketh a lie, but they who are written in the Lamb's book of life.* According to the declarations of Scripture, all impenitent sinners are defilers. They all work that which is abominable in the sight of God, and in this character, as they have not repented, nor believed in the Redeemer, nor ceased to sin, they will all appear before their Judge; and therefore will *in nowise* be permitted to enter the heavenly city.

To these passages might be added, as every one who reads

his Bible knows, a multitude of others declaring the same doctrine in the same unambiguous manner. But if these do not produce conviction, it will I am afraid be vainly expected, not only from any which are found in the Scriptures, but from any which language can express.

To all this however it is farther objected, that *God cannot justly punish the sins of men, who are finite beings, with an infinite or endless punishment.* To this it is usually replied, that although men are finite beings, yet as their obligation to obedience is great in proportion to the greatness and excellency of God, it is of course infinite. To violate infinite obligation, it is farther said, is plainly an infinite evil; and therefore a finite being may commit a crime infinitely heinous, and deserving infinite punishment. The same conclusion is also drawn by much the same course of reasoning, from the tendency of sin to oppose the designs and glory of God, and the supreme good of his creation.

It is not my design to deny this doctrine; nor to scrutinize the arguments by which it is usually supported. It is however but just to observe, that neither the doctrine nor the arguments have appeared so satisfactory to the minds of others, as they seem to have done to those by whom they have been alleged. We know nothing of infinity, but *the fact that certain things are infinite.* The *nature* of infinity we do not comprehend at all; nor form a conception of what this phraseology means. It hardly needs to be observed, that where we have no conceptions, we can form no comparisons; and therefore can make no propositions the truth of which can be perceived by our minds. Concerning the fact that something is infinite, we may with sufficient care argue, to some extent successfully. Concerning the nature of infinity, I discern no manner in which such minds as ours can argue at all. But in our discussions concerning infinity, we are prone insensibly to blend these two things together; and often are amused with words only, when we suppose ourselves to be employed about ideas. Hence have arisen the perplexity and the want of satisfaction which have attended inquiries concerning this subject. I shall therefore not insist on these arguments; nor on the conclusion to which they conduct us;

but proceed to other considerations which lie more within our reach.

1. *God may justly punish sin so long as it exists; and it may exist for ever.*

He who sins through this life, may evidently sin through another such period, and another, and another, without end. That while we continue to sin, God may justly punish us, if he can justly punish us at all, is equally evident. No reason can be given why sin may not be punished at any future time with as much justice and propriety as at the present. That it may be justly punished at the present time, cannot be denied any more than that it is in fact punished.

2. *The Scriptures teach us, that sinners who die in impenitence will not cease to sin throughout eternity.*

The supposition, that their sufferings in the future world will be complete, involves in it as a consequence that they will continue to sin. If they were to become penitent and virtuous, they would of course possess many enjoyments, and those of a very important nature. Our Saviour, speaking to St. John concerning those, who in the future world are excluded from heaven, says, Rev. xxii. 15, *Without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie.* It will not be questioned, that this is an account of sinners. It cannot be questioned, that it is an account of their existing character in the future world.

Do therefore, says Solomon, Eccl. ix. 10, *what thy hand findeth to do with thy might: for there is no work, device, knowledge, nor wisdom, in the world of spirits, whither thou goest. Wisdom,* in the language of Solomon, denotes virtue, or the religion of the heart. *Work* here intends the work of salvation; the work in which virtue is assumed and increased. There is then, in that world, no work of salvation, no assumption of virtue. Of course those who go into that world in the character of sinners, still continue to sin. They may therefore be punished with the same justice as in the present world; and the Scriptures declare in the text, and many other passages, that they are punished.

3. *These things are all said and done after the close of the present dispensation; and after the commencement of*

that dispensation which in the Scriptures is represented as eternal and unchangeable.

There is no hint given us, either in the Old or New Testament, that the dispensation which will commence after the judgment will ever change. On the contrary, so far as it is mentioned at all, it is always spoken of as enduring and immutable. In Heb. xii. 26—28, St. Paul says, *Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. And this word, yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Wherefore, we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.* From this passage it is evident, that the things which are not shaken will remain steadfast and immoveable. But were there nothing explicitly declared concerning this subject, the very silence of the Scriptures forbids a rational belief of any such alteration, since the belief rests on nothing but a mere hypothesis gratuitously adopted.

It is farther objected, that *the benevolence of God is irreconcilable with the idea of endless punishment.* Were I to determine *a priori*, what conduct the benevolence of God would prompt him to pursue; I should not hesitate to say, that he would never permit either natural or moral evil to exist in the universe. Perfect benevolence, I should without a doubt conclude, would produce nothing but virtue and enjoyment. Very remote however from this scheme is the actual state of the world which we inhabit. Sin has here reigned from the beginning; and sorrow, the proper reward of sin, has been multiplied unceasingly throughout every habitable part of the earth. It is certain therefore, that to permit the existence of sin, and to punish it with suffering, and that suffering often so excruciating as to terminate our present life, are things consistent with the benevolence of God. No reason can be given why he who does these things here, in a state of trial, may not do the same things, to a much greater extent, in a state of retribution. When man undertakes to determine what it is proper or improper for his Maker to do in the government of the

world, he ought to remember, that, *As the heavens are high above the earth, so are his ways above our ways, and his thoughts above our thoughts.*

It is farther said, that *the punishment of the future world is merely disciplinary.* This opinion certainly cannot be founded upon scriptural testimony. When the gospel was written, the fallen angels had been suffering punishment at least four thousand years. Yet we find them no less hostile to their Creator, and actuated by no less malice against his intelligent creatures, than at the first. Men of all succeeding ages are by Christ and his apostles warned against their falsehood and seduction, because in every age they would be false and seductive. At the judgment day, to which they are *reserved under chains and darkness,* they will be consigned to the fire which was prepared for them. Of course their punishment will to that time have had no good effect upon their character. The punishment of the future world therefore, is not exhibited in the Scriptures as disciplinary.

Again it is objected, that *endless punishment is unnecessary.* This cannot be said with propriety, unless we know the whole state of the divine government, and all the necessities of those who are governed. The wants of the universe are such as to be supplied by far other means than we should devise. It is impossible for us to determine how great, how numerous, or how useful, the consequences may be which will flow from the punishment of the impenitent. God, speaking by the prophet Isaiah, in a passage which our Saviour applies to the future state of the wicked, says, *They,* that is righteous beings, *shall go forth and look upon the carcasses of the men who have transgressed against me; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh.* This abhorrence may, for aught that appears, have a powerful, perhaps an indispensable, efficacy to preserve virtuous beings throughout the universe in a course of endless obedience. The measures necessary in a moral government, reaching through immensity and eternity, cannot be contrived by such beings as we are.

I know of but one objection more which appears to demand a particular answer. This is derived from the gospel. Here in various passages and forms it is said, that

Christ died for all. The meaning of these declarations I formerly explained, and if I mistake not sufficiently, when considering the extent of the atonement. I shall therefore only observe at this time, that with the strictest propriety and truth, Christ may be said to have *died for all, if he has made a sufficient atonement for all;* although some should choose not to accept the proffer of an interest in it, and should therefore never enjoy the blessings which it provides.

To these objections and arguments are customarily added several passages of Scripture, construed by the objectors in such a manner as they judge to be favourable to their own scheme. These have been often shewn to be vainly alleged for this purpose; nor are they, so far as I perceive, articles on which the objectors very seriously rely. I shall therefore refer those of my audience, who wish to see these texts particularly considered, to formal treatises written on the subject, and to respectable commentaries on the Scriptures, and shall conclude this discourse with the following

REMARK;

That the considerations presented in this discourse strongly exhibit the folly of hazarding the soul upon the doctrines of universalism.

The peculiar evil of the doctrine which I have opposed in this discourse is this; those who embrace it are prone, almost of course, to feel that they are in some good degree safe, while continuing in a state of impenitence and unbelief. The heart relishes sin, and disrelishes reformation. Hence it devises various modes of quieting its fears concerning the anger of God, and securing itself from future woe. To forsake its iniquities is, according to its own views, to strip itself of all real good; and therefore does not enter into its plans, nor become any part of its conduct. Still it cannot bear the thought of being punished for its sins. In this situation it contrives various schemes by which it hopes on the one hand to enjoy the pleasures of sin, and on the other to escape punishment. For this purpose some persons become Atheists, and deny the very existence of God. Others become Deists, and deny his word and character. Others, who acknowledge the revelation of

the Scriptures, reject the atonement of Christ; and others the necessity and reality of regeneration by the Spirit of God; merely that they may neither be obliged to confess nor to feel themselves so sinful, as to need these things. Some determine, that they shall be safe on account of the natural amiableness of their dispositions; some on account of the abundance of their good works; their uprightness towards men; their zealous attendance on the external duties of religion; the fervid state of their imagination, and their feelings with respect to religious subjects; or their correct and abundant conversation about religious doctrines. Others still adopt, for the same purpose, the scheme of universalism; to something very like which, in substance, all the other schemes which I have mentioned directly tend; whether perceived by those who embrace them, or not perceived. Of those who embrace this scheme, some admit, that the impenitent will be punished for a season. Others deny, that they will be punished at all. Some hold, that Christ has, in the complete sense, expiated the sins of all men: while others consider the impenitent as expiating their own sins by sufferings limited in their duration. In all these different schemes it is obvious, that not a single contrivance is adopted to make men virtuous. This evidently is no part of their designs. On the contrary, every one is calculated only to foster the love of sinning, and provide safety for the sinner.

But how suspicious is this design in its very nature? Is there, to the eye of common sense, even a remote probability, that God will love sin, or prosper sinners? Do the Scriptures furnish a single hint which in the remotest manner even countenances such an opinion? Do they not on the contrary hold out the most terrible alarms to every impenitent transgressor? Would it not break the heart of every such transgressor in this house, if God were audibly to declare to him, "*Thou* shalt go away into everlasting punishment?" Trust not then your souls, your eternal safety, to the doctrines of universalism. Launch not into the ocean of eternity upon this plank. Flee to Christ; the ark in which you will be secured from every danger. Waste not your probation in seeking *refuges of lies*, in *making covenants with death and agreements with hell*. Remem-

ber, that God hath said, *Your covenant with death shall be disannulled, and your agreement with hell shall not stand.* Remember, that Christ himself has told you, that *He who believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and that he who believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.*

SERMON CLXVIII.

THE REMOTER CONSEQUENCES OF DEATH.

PUNISHMENT OF THE WICKED. ITS NATURE.

But these, as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed,—shall utterly perish in their own corruption. —2 PETER II. 12.

IN the preceding discourse, I considered *the duration of future punishment.* I shall now make some observations concerning *its nature.*

That this punishment will be intense and dreadful, is declared in the words which I have chosen for the theme of this discourse. In the same language it is declared to be hopeless. Those who utterly perish, and who know that this is their destiny as pronounced by God himself, can entertain no hope of a change in their circumstances for the better. They are *judged according to the deeds done in the body;* or, in other words, during the time of their probation. But their probation is ended; and the foundation on which the judgment rests completed. Nothing remains for them, therefore, but a reward measured out to them according to their works. This reward, as the reason of man has in all ages believed, and as the Scriptures peremptorily decide, will be only punishment.

The punishment of impenitent sinners may be considered,

As it will proceed immediately from God, and,

As it will spring from themselves.

On the punishment of sinners, as *immediately inflicted by the hand of God*, it is to be observed, that it is described to us in the Scriptures in general terms, and those chiefly if not wholly figurative. One reason why such language is employed is obvious and sufficient. A state of existence so different from any thing with which we are acquainted in the present world, cannot be directly described by words, denoting only such things as are within our reach, and expressing only such ideas as we have been able to form. It is therefore necessarily exhibited to us in phraseology, not used according to its simple or literal meaning, but employed in the way of simile and allusion. Even in this manner however it is so employed as to convey to us the most terrible images which have ever been presented to the human mind; and such as in all ages have, more than any others, awakened alarm and anguish in the heart of man.

It is called death.

Death, as was observed in a former discourse, is the most distressing of all the evils suffered in the present world, and is accordingly made by every nation the last infliction of penal justice for crimes committed against human government. It is surrounded with gloom and terror; it is replete with agony; and probably creates more anxiety in the minds of our race, than all the other calamities, which exist in this suffering world.

What then must it be to die for ever; to suffer the pangs of death to-day, only as a prelude to suffering them to-morrow! What must it be to die from morning till night, and from night till morning; to die through days, and years, and centuries; and thus to spend eternity in dying!

It is presented to us as the sufferance of the wrath of God.

The anger even of a human being is often productive of the most terrible effects which are ever visible in the present world. The earthquake, the volcano, the famine, and the pestilence, have wasted the world less, and produced in it far less misery, than conquerors alone. But if the rage of such limited, feeble, perishing beings as we are, can produce such dreadful sufferings, what must be the effects of the anger of him, *before whom all nations are as nothing, who looketh on the earth, and it trembleth; who toucheth*

the hills, and they smoke; who possesses all the means of infliction, and can make every faculty the seat, and every pore the avenue, of pain and sorrow! *A fire,* saith this great and awful Being, *is kindled in mine anger, and shall burn unto the lowest hell; and shall consume the earth with her increase; and shall set on fire the foundations of the mountains.*

It is called *darkness, and the mist, and the blackness of* DARKNESS: and sometimes *the shadow of death;* that is, a gloom resembling the deep midnight of the grave.

If the inhabitants of this world were to continue here for ever, and the light of the sun, moon, and stars, were to be finally extinguished; if darkness, such as that which covered Egypt, were to brood upon the surface of the whole earth; how forlorn, solitary, and desolate, would be the situation of mankind! How much alone, how bewildered, how hopeless, how lost, should we feel! How would every bosom heave with unavailing sighs, how would every heart waste with fruitless longings, to see once more the delightful beams of the life-giving sun!

God is the sun of the moral universe. Where he sheds the light of his countenance, light, and life, and warmth, and comfort, descend upon the creatures whom he has made. Wherever he hides his face, they are overspread with *darkness and the shadow of death, where there is no order, and the light is as darkness.* In the future world, eternal darkness and its consequence, eternal solitude, will become the dreary and melancholy lot of all the children of perdition: a darkness, lengthening onward from age to age, and terminated by no succeeding day.

It is often styled *fire; a furnace of fire;* a *lake of fire and brimstone; the fire prepared for the devil and his angels.*

The power of this element to distress and destroy needs no illustration: as the peculiar strength of these images demands no enhancement. How dreadful must be the situation of those who are destined to dwell in a furnace for ever! How terrible must be the fire prepared to punish the devil and his angels; the worst of all beings, the peculiar enemies of God and the intelligent universe! You will remember, that I have mentioned all these as figurative representations. Remember also, that on this account they are not the less

awful: and particularly remember, that in a more awful language still, God himself is declared to be *a consuming fire* to impenitent sinners.

The sufferings of the impenitent, *as they will spring from themselves*, are, I apprehend, declared with sufficient certainty in the phraseology of the text. *They shall utterly perish in their own corruption.* This word and its immediate connexions are used in the English Bible eighty-three times, and in forty-eight of these denotes *moral corruption*. In all the remaining instances they denote obviously *the corruptible nature* of the human body, and of those earthly objects by which we are surrounded. These two seem to be the only senses in which the words of this description are used at all. That the term in the text is not employed in this sense, is too evident to require any illustration. The passage therefore may be fairly considered as declaring, *that the moral character of sinners will in itself and in its effects constitute much of their misery in the future world.* It ought to be observed, that the text literally rendered, is, *They shall be utterly corrupted in their own corruption.*

The only objection against this doctrine with which I am acquainted is, that *sin, being the delight of sinners, cannot with propriety be said to be their punishment.* This objection I acknowledge, is plausible; and when it was first proposed to me, appeared to have much weight. A little reflection however convinced me, that its weight lay only in the words in which it is expressed. It is no uncommon thing in the present world to see persons delight in that which, in itself and its immediate effects, is seen by themselves to be continually injurious, and even fatal, to their well-being. *The gambler* sees, that his favourite employment produces every day gloom, discontent, moroseness, poverty, and the contempt of those around him. Far from being insensible to these evils, he feels them deeply; and is daily rendered by them more and more unhappy. The same things are substantially true of *the drunkard* and of *the thief*. *The envious man* also is daily corroded by his envy in such a manner as to make him eminently wretched. Yet he still continues to exercise envy. *A rebellious child*, wounded almost unceasingly by a sense of his filial impiety, as well as

made miserable by the general reprobation, still continues in his rebellion. Christ says, Prov. viii. 36, *All they that hate me love death.* This passage directly teaches us, that that which in itself and in its consequences produces misery, may still be loved by mankind. The complete proof however of the soundness of the doctrine, and by consequence of the unsoundness of the objection, will be found in the consideration of the subject itself. To this therefore I shall immediately proceed; and observe,

1. *That sinful desires will, in the future world, be exceedingly powerful, and wholly unrestrained.*

That such desires will be exceedingly powerful in the future world is rationally argued from many considerations. It is plainly a part of the very nature of sin to increase its dominion over the mind, wherever it is the predominant character. Sinners who do not reform, always grow worse and worse in the present world. Every indulgence of every sinful passion increases its strength. After a little time the indulgence becomes a habit; and every sinful habit increases its vigour in him who is not renewed to the end of life.

There is not a reason to believe, that these desires are at all diminished in the world to come. When Satan was cast out of heaven, he manifested his intense hatred to God, and his vehement malice towards mankind, by seducing our first parents and destroying a world. St. Peter informs us, that since that time, *as a roaring lion, he goeth about, seeking whom he may devour.* St. John also declares, that the same malignant being *deceiveth the whole world.* What a dreadful image of furious and insatiable malice is presented to us, when this evil being is exhibited as a lion roaring with rage and hunger, and going about to devour not the carcasses of beasts, but minds rational and immortal! How restlessly must that fraud and malice labour, to which the deception of a whole world is attributed!

From these considerations it is plain, that the evil desires of this fallen spirit are not diminished by his sufferings. It is reasonably believed, that other evil beings will in this respect sustain the same character; and that their desires also, instead of undergoing any diminution, will only increase in strength.

When I say, that sinful desires are unrestrained in the future world, I mean not to be understood in the absolute sense. God will undoubtedly restrain evil beings within such bounds as he thinks proper. They themselves also will undoubtedly become restraints to each other in the exercise of their opposing powers and passions. But I mean, that a great part of those restraints which exist in the present world, will be taken away. The impenitent inhabitants of the future world will be under no restraint from *hope:* for in that world hope will never exist. They will be under no restraint from *the desire of esteem:* for they will have no companions whose esteem they can desire. They will be under no restraint from *the Spirit of God.* This divinely glorious Person, beneath whose influence, moral life, beauty, and loveliness, spontaneously spring up throughout the universe, will shed no influence on the world of perdition.

2. *Sinful desires will in the future world be ungratified.*

Particularly they will be ungratified *as they respect God.* All the wishes of the impenitent which respect God, are aimed against his glory, the accomplishment of his pleasure, and the prosperity of his kingdom. But they will be wholly ineffectual. His character will be seen, and known, and felt, even by themselves, to be free from all imputations; and they will discern, with irresistible evidence, that his pleasure will be certainly and universally accomplished.

The wishes of the impenitent, *which respect virtuous beings,* will be equally ungratified. Against *them* also, their hatred will be directed with intense vehemence: against *them* their envy will rankle without cessation or limits. Still the objects of their hatred will be seen fixed in the possession of virtue, glory, and happiness, which will know neither interruption nor end. That such will be the feelings of the sinner beyond the grave, we are assured, because such is the very nature of sin; because men in this world, who give themselves up to sin, exhibit just such feelings; and because the inhabitants of that world are *entirely* given up to sin. How dreadful must be the ranklings of eternal malice! What a mass of woe must exist in the pinings of immortal envy!

Nor will the desires of the impenitent be any more grati-

fied *as they respect each other*. They may indeed, they undoubtedly will, produce much misery for each other. Their success in this malignant employment will not however terminate in their relief or their comfort; but merely in disappointment, bitterness, and woe. Malice and revenge, in the present world, are often efficacious in producing suffering in the objects of them; but, instead of yielding enjoyment to those by whom they are exercised, they frequently effectuate nothing but the deepest mortification. It will not be doubted, that in the future world the same things will be more universally, as well as more dreadfully, realized.

As little gratification will attend those desires *which immediately respect themselves*. Sinners, in this world, ardently wish to be respected and loved. Pride, the predominating passion of a wicked heart, prompts that heart to covet distinction and applause, with an intenseness of desire which the proud man cannot justify even to himself. The Scriptures teach us, that this passion was originally, and is still, the controlling, miserable character of fallen angels. Suffering therefore does not extinguish it in the world of perdition. On the contrary, we have every reason to believe, that it is unceasing, ardent, and eternal. How dreadfully must a proud mind be stung with anguish, when it sees itself, and knows that others see it, to be base, despicable, and loathsome, beyond expression; and when it discerns with absolute certainty, that this will be its eternal character!

What deplorable sufferings spring from vehement desires ungratified, our experience in the present world amply discovers.

3. *Sin, in the world of misery, will be viewed as it is.*

We are taught in the Scriptures, that at the general judgment, the end of which is to shew, that God is *just when he judges, and clear when he condemns, every mouth will be stopped*. Accordingly, the excellence of his character, the equity of his law, the wisdom of his government, and the goodness exercised in the work of redemption, will all be manifested in such a manner as to compel every conscience to say Amen. Every conscience will therefore be forced to confess the odiousness of that sin which is a violation of

them all, and of the sinner by whom they have been violated.

It may perhaps be asked, why, if such will be the view of the sinner concerning himself, he does not renounce his sins? This question may be fairly answered by another. Why do not sinners forsake their sins in the present world, particularly when under the influence of strong convictions? Conscience often pronounces to the sinner, that he is a guilty, odious being, deserving the anger of God, and justly condemned by the sentence of his law. Yet multitudes who are the subjects of his conviction, still continue impenitent; and become worse and worse, more hardened in sin, and more alienated from their Maker. It will not be questioned, that the drunkard, the thief, and the adulterer, believe at times that they are subjects of gross criminality; and that in spite of this belief, they still continue to be drunkards, adulterers, and thieves. As little can it be questioned, that there is in the moral nature of a sinful mind, no tendency towards repentance or reformation. These *good gifts*, like every other, *are from above; and come down from the Father of lights.*

4. *The impenitent, in the future world, will be the subjects of extreme remorse of conscience.*

The character of every such man, being seen by himself as it is, will of course be loathed, abhorred, and despised. His folly and his guilt, in violating the divine law, and rejecting the divine mercy, in dishonouring God, disbelieving the Redeemer, and resisting the Holy Ghost, in contemning the means of grace, and disregarding the warnings of Providence, will, in a particular manner, prey upon his heart; and exhibit him to himself as weak and wicked beyond expression. All his sinful conduct he will loathe as base and abominable. But his abuses of the divine character, his ungrateful and injurious treatment of the Saviour, and of the mercy of God manifested in the work of redemption, will overwhelm him with self-condemnation; and pierce his soul with the anguish of self-reproach.

5. *Impenitent sinners will, in the future world, become means of extreme suffering to each other.*

In the present world sinners often love each other. The sources of this affection are the following.

First; *Natural affection.*

On this it will be unnecessary to expatiate.

Secondly; *Connexions growing out of common interests.*

These are often strong, and sometimes lasting. Out of them, those who are concerned derive many enjoyments.

Thirdly; *Mistaken views of each other's characters.*

Ignorance, concealment, and a desire to be agreeable, hide many of the defects and many of the vices found in a sinful character. At the same time, the wish to gain esteem, confidence, and kind offices, induces those who are the subjects of this character, to exhibit a pleasing temper and commendable conduct. In this manner, the whole impression that is made, is more agreeable than that which would be derived from a thorough knowledge of the entire character.

Fourthly; *Natural amiableness.*

By this, I intend native sweetness of disposition, tenderness, generosity, sincerity, and integrity.

Fifthly; *The numerous restraints which sinners experience from the Spirit and providence of God.*

These not only prevent the sinner from appearing, but from being, so bad as he would be otherwise; as we have frequent opportunities to observe even here, when such restraints are taken away. Many a man who in humble life has been mild, gentle, and reasonable, in his conduct, has become, after being raised to absolute power, a villain black with every species of crime. Even Nero was regarded, before he assumed the purple, as a hopeful prince. For these and some other reasons, sinful men are often considered in the present world, both by those who are virtuous and by each other, with much respect and affection. In the future world their situation will in all these particulars be mightily changed. There, no natural affection will exist to prevent the full operation of evil desires. On the contrary, those who have lived together in habits of attachment and intimacy, will see and feel that they were mutual tempters and seducers here; sources to each other of sin; and means of each other's destruction. At the same time, none will have favours to bestow; nor a native amiablenes of character to invite esteem or love. Nor will any restraint

operate so as to prevent the heart from emptying out all its wickedness in the open day.

Contempt therefore, deceit, and hatred, will occupy the whole soul, and dictate all the conduct. The dreadful effects of these passions; their proper, genuine effects; we often behold in the present world, in slander, oppression, wounds, and murders; and in the terrible ravages of tyranny and war. In what manner these evil dispositions will be manifested in a state of being of which we can form no adequate conception, it is beyond our power to determine. But that their whole strength may be there completely disclosed, and disclosed in such a manner as to produce all the misery capable of being derived from this source, cannot be questioned. The rage which here persecutes an enemy to the grave, and laments that it cannot follow him into the invisible world, may there pursue him through eternity.

Sixthly; *From these considerations it is evident, that there can be no confidence in the regions of misery.*

The wretched inhabitants of these regions will know all around them to be enemies and deceivers. Amid the vast multitude, not an individual will be found possessed either of natural affection, or benevolence, or sincerity. Selfishness, supreme and absolute, repels every thing and attracts nothing.

This probably will be one of the most painful and wearisome among all the ingredients of future woe. A rational mind instinctively looks to some object on which it may rest in its journey through the vast of duration. How oppressive must it be to such a mind, to roam in its thoughts through immensity, and to wander down the vale of eternity, and find no friend, no being, on whom this affection may be placed.

God is the natural, supreme, and ultimate object of reliance to his intelligent creatures; a never-failing, all-sufficient stay; a friend that cannot deceive; a rock that cannot be moved. *Blessed,* unspeakably blessed, *is the man who trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is.* All virtuous beings also, in their different situations and capacities, are proper objects of confidence; safe, amiable, and

valuable friends. Among sinful beings, parents and other near relatives are usually trusted with safety and comfort; and sweeten the bitterness of life, by inviting and meriting the reliance of those with whom they are intimately connected. Few indeed, very few, of the human race, are here either so sinful or so unhappy, as not to find some object to whom they may communicate their calamities with the hope of relief and the assurance of pity.

But the miserable inhabitants of hell have no God, no Saviour, no virtuous friends, no parents, no relations, before whom they may spread their calamities with the hope of being heard, or in whose hearts or hands they may find a refuge from the bitterness of woe. In each other they can place no confidence; since they will know that at all times and in all things they will be only despised, hated, and deceived.

Thus while the inhabitant of that melancholy world looks around him; when he casts his eyes abroad through the universe, he will be forced to perceive, that it contains no friend to him. In the midst of millions he is alone; and is sure of being loathed, rejected, and shunned, by every being in the creation of God. Not a sigh can he breathe; not a tear can he shed; not a sorrow can he unfold; not a prayer can he utter; with a hope of being befriended, heard, or regarded. In addition to all this, if he extend his view through eternity, he will find as he passes onward from day to day, and from age to age, no change for the better. All around him will be gloom and solitude: all before him will be desolation, anguish, and despair.

This awful subject and these terrible considerations concerning it, are full of instruction, admonition, and reproof. The time will however only permit me to make the following

REMARKS.

1. *How great an evil is sin!*

All the sufferings which have been mentioned in this discourse are either the rewards, the attendants, or the consequences, of sin. The rewards of sin express, with absolute exactness, the just views which the unerring eye of omniscience forms concerning this dreadful attribute of intelligent

creatures. The attendants and consequences of sin exhibit its nature directly; and display immediately its turpitude to our eyes. In the former case we have the most decisive proof of its malignity, because it is impossible that God should in any degree mistake the true nature of this subject. In the latter case we have what may, without very great violence, be called an experimental view of the same malignity. The evidence in the former case ought to produce entire conviction in every mind. The impression in the latter case cannot easily fail deeply to affect the heart. The evils attendant and consequent upon sin, which impregnate the fountain and flow out in the streams, have been here very summarily presented to your view. They have not been exaggerated. On the contrary, the exhibition is lame and feeble compared with the fact. Even the world which we inhabit, furnished as it is with innumerable blessings, has long realized a great part of what I have declared. The earth has *groaned and travailed in pain*, under the mighty pressure of sin, from the apostacy to the present hour. Every breeze has been loaded with the sighs, every hill has echoed the groans, of suffering mankind. The heart has been wrung with anguish from the cradle to the grave. Lewdness has changed the world into a lazar house of corruption; and anticipated the work of death and the grave. Deceit and fraud have mocked human expectations; tortured confidence; and hurried their miserable victims in millions to beggary, despair, and death. Rage and revenge have plunged the midnight dagger in the unsuspecting bosom of the neighbour and the friend; and in their sanguinary progress have multiplied widows and orphans, childless parents, and hopeless mourners, without number, and without end. Ambition has turned the earth into a stall of butchery and blood; and covered its surface with the bones of men; while tyranny like the Nubian blast has spread decay and death through the unhappy millions found in its course; withered the last remains of comfort and hope; and converted provinces and kingdoms into scenes of desolation and woe. What then, we naturally ask, will be the ravages of the same principle when goaded on by passions, and armed with powers, far superior to those which have existed on this side of the

grave? What must be the ravages of sin unrestrained, of sin hopeless, of sin eternal! How evidently would it, if permitted, change any world into a hell!

2. *How ought these considerations to alarm every person in this assembly.*

There is in this house a considerable number of individuals who hope that they are Christians; but not one of them *knows* that this is his true character. Some doubt still remains in every breast. But where so much is at hazard, however small that hazard may seem, what efforts can be too great to be made for our escape! With these awful scenes full in view, how much alive, how much awake, how ardent, how incessant, ought every Christian to be in his exertions, in his struggles to *flee from the wrath to come,* and to *lay hold on eternal life!* Were these considerations present to the minds of all religious professors, in such a manner as their importance loudly demands, how much more fervent would be their prayers, how much more vigorous their labours, how much more exemplary their lives!

There are others in this assembly who, in their own view, as well as that of others, have no claim to the character or to the hopes of Christians. Of these the number, it is to be feared, is not small. To these what shall I say? Plainly, I can say nothing which, with the remotest probability, can be expected to move them; if they are not roused to anxious attention, and the most distressing alarm, by the awful things which have been said in this discourse, by the knell of impenitence which they have now heard. It is the knell of eternal death, of millions for ever dying, and buried in an eternal grave. Who of you intends to be reckoned with these miserable beings? Which of you does not tremble at the bare thought of meeting the anger of God, of being destroyed alway, of dying day by day for ever? Which of you does not shrink with horror from the apprehension of sustaining this dreadful character of absolute turpitude, of becoming a mere mass of sin, an eternal enemy of God, and of every intelligent being, of being known by others, and of knowing himself, to be only guilty, odious, and despicable, throughout endless ages? Which

of you is not overwhelmed with amazement at the bare thought of being united with such companions as have been here described; of living for ever in the midst of fiends and fiend-like men; beings tossed and convulsed by furious passions; rankling with envy, malice, and rage, hating truth and righteousness, putrid with deceit, forming no plan, pursuing no purpose, but to dishonour God, and ruin each other. Do not your *hearts die within* you, and *become as stone*, at the thought of inhabiting that world, *whose light is as darkness*, and which is overspread with *the shadow of death*; of feeling out your malancholy path through an endless solitude, through the regions of *lamentation, mourning, and woe*; alone in the midst of multitudes, without a friend, without a comfort, without a hope!

To these questions there can be no answer, without a denial of our nature. Let me then, in the name of him with whose commission I stand before you, and by whose authority I speak this day, solemnly warn you, that the only way in which you can escape these immeasurable evils, is to yield yourselves to him in the faith, repentance, and holiness, of the gospel. Let me solemnly remind you, that *He who believeth shall be saved, and he who believeth not shall be damned.*

SERMON CLXIX.

THE REMOTER CONSEQUENCES OF DEATH.

REWARDS OF THE RIGHTEOUS. THE NEW CREATION.

Nevertheless, we, according to his promise, look for new heavens, and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.
—2 PET. iii. 13.

IN the two preceding discourses, I considered *the duration and nature of the punishment destined to impenitent sinners in the future world.* The next subject of discussion is, the

rewards which will hereafter be given to the penitent. This subject I propose to examine in the present discourse *generally*. Hereafter I intend to make it *the theme of a more particular discussion.*

In the tenth verse of the context, St. Peter informs us, that *the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burnt up.* In the text he goes on to inform us farther, that notwithstanding this mighty revolution, so alarming, and apparently so fatal, to the happiness and the hopes of good men, those hopes shall still not be disappointed. *Nevertheless,* he adds, *we,* that is, we, the apostles of our Lord and Saviour, and all persons of piety who are instructed by us, and understand the Scriptures of the Old Testament, *look, according to his promise, for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.* The promise here referred to seems to be that which was made to Abraham, Gen. xvi. 8. Here God established his covenant with this patriarch, and with his seed after him, for an everlasting covenant; and promised to them the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession. The seed of Abraham, we are taught by St. Paul, are of two descriptions; the natural and the spiritual. To the natural seed, or his lineal descendants, Canaan was promised in the literal sense. To his spiritual descendants, the promise was given in a figurative sense only; and in this sense only was the possession promised everlasting. To those who were *Jews outwardly,* and whose *circumcision is outward in the flesh,* was promised the typical earthly Canaan. The antitype, the heavenly Canaan, was promised to those only who were *Jews inwardly, whose circumcision was that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter, whose praise is not of men, but of God.*

This promise was afterward often repeated, both in the same terms, and in others more explicit. It is often mentioned in the Psalms, particularly in the seventy-second and eighty-ninth; and often by the prophets. The prophet Isaiah adopts, in two instances, the very language here used by St. Peter. *Behold,* says God, speaking by this

prophet, *I create new heavens, and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. But be ye glad, and rejoice for ever, in that which I create: for behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and my people a joy:* chapter lxv. 17, 18. And again, chapter lxvi. 22, *For as the new heavens and the new earth which I will make shall remain before me, saith the Lord, so shall your seed and your name remain.* In the first of these passages, the declaration, *Behold, I create new heavens, and a new earth,* appears to be used figuratively, and to be so explained in the succeeding verse, where it is obviously interpreted to mean the restoration of holiness to the endless multitude of the first-born by the Spirit of God, through the redemption of Christ. Even in this case, however, it may with propriety be considered as including all that pertains to this mighty work, and to involve not only the renovation of the mind, but also its succeeding progress, in higher and higher attainments of virtue throughout endless duration. This is the more probable, because in the latter passage there is a plain reference to the former, indicating, that the new heavens and the new earth, mentioned in both, are the same; and because the phrase in the latter passage is used in the literal sense, and has evidently the same signification as in the text.

Heavens and earth, in Jewish phraseology, as I have observed elsewhere, denoted *the universe.* In the present case, however, the words appear to be used with a meaning less extended, as well as in the tenth and twelfth verses, where it is declared, that that which is intended by both terms, shall be consumed, dissolved, and pass away. This astonishing event, we are taught, will take place at the final judgment; and we have no hint in the Scriptures, that the judgment will involve any other beings beside angels and men. The new creation here mentioned is also exhibited as the future residence of angels and men. Other intelligent beings, therefore, and the worlds which they inhabit, may be regarded as concerned in this wonderful production, only in a mediate and remoter sense. But in whatever manner we extend or limit the phrase, it is clear, from the tenth and twelfth verses, that a part of the creation

will be destroyed; and, from the text, that a new part, sufficiently great to be styled new heavens and a new earth, will be created in its stead.

In the text, St. Peter teaches us, that the things shaken and removed by the conflagration are destroyed, to make way for a new heaven and a new earth. The same truth we are taught by St. John, in the twenty-first chapter of Revelation. *And I saw a new heaven and a new earth*, that is, after the general judgment, *for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and he that sat on the throne said, Behold, I make all things new; and he said, Write, for these words are true and faithful.* From these declarations it is obvious, that such a change will hereafter take place in the creation of God, as will in the proper sense verify this prediction. The first heaven and the first earth will pass away, and a new heaven and a new earth will occupy their place in the universe. When these are called new, it is plainly meant, that they shall be essentially changed in their form, character, and circumstances. All things in that part of the universe denoted by these words, and not improbably in the universe at large, will, at least in a qualified sense, become new also.

On this wonderful subject how easily is the imagination lost! Every solemn emotion of the mind is, almost of course, awakened and engrossed by the fall of a kingdom or empire. The bare recital of such a termination of human greatness, instinctively prompts the sigh of commiseration, and the thrill of awe; and we pause in intense and bewildered thought, while we bend over the tomb of departed glory. An eclipse of the moon, and still more of the sun, fixes the eyes of half mankind in astonishment and terror, and millions shudder with the most apprehensive forebodings, while the last beams of the glorious luminary are withdrawing from the sight. What then must be the emotions which will crowd upon the soul at the departure of a world, when its funeral fires shall be kindled by the breath of the Son of God, its knell sounded by the last trumpet, and the voice of the archangel; and its obsequies celebrated with immense and melancholy grandeur by the assembled universe. How would our hearts die within us, to see the stars falling from heaven, the moon changed

into blood, the light of the sun expire, and the heavens themselves flee away from the face of him that sitteth on the throne!

At the creation of this world, *the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy.* The minds of these glorious intelligences beheld, with amazement and rapture, the formless mass rise into being at the command of the Creator; the new-born light wander over its desolate surface, the dry land heave, the ocean expand immeasurably, verdure clothe the world, life inhabit it, the lights of heaven rejoice to begin their course, and man, awaking into existence, commence his first song of wonder, gratitude, and praise. How will this astonishment and rapture be enhanced, when they and we behold the new heavens and the new earth called into being by the same voice; worlds destined to be the immortal residence of truth and peace, of virtue, glory, and joy, fresh from the hand of the Creator, blooming with vernal undecaying life, and brightening beneath the dawn of everlasting day. With what transport will the virtuous universe exclaim at this divine era, *Worthy art thou, O Lord, to receive glory, and honour, and power; for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created!*

It will not be doubted, that such a mighty change in the kingdom of JEHOVAH is effectuated for reasons of the highest import, and will be followed by consequences sufficiently great, permanent, and desirable, to justify so amazing a transaction. This interesting subject I shall attempt to illustrate in the following manner:—

I. *The system of the divine dispensations towards this world will, at the time specified, come to an end.*

This world was created to become the scene of one great system of dispensations towards the race of Adam; the scene of their existence and their trial, of their holiness or their sin, and their penitence and reformation, or their sin, penitence and obduracy. It was intended also to be the theatre of a mysterious and wonderful scheme of providence. The first rebellion in the divine kingdom commenced in heaven; the second existed here. The first was perpetrated by the highest, the second by the lowest order

of intelligent creatures. These two are with high probability the only instances in which the Ruler of all things has been disobeyed by his rational subjects. The Scriptures give us no hint of any other conduct of the same nature; and no beings are exhibited in them as condemned at the final day, or sent down to the world of perdition, beside fallen angels and fallen men. As therefore these are often mentioned as fallen creatures, and these only, it is rationally argued, that no other beings of this character have existed.

The Scriptures appear to speak of other worlds under the name *heaven*, besides *the heaven of saints and angels*. Thus the phrase *heaven of heavens* obviously denotes a heaven among as well as above other heavens. *Heavenly places*, language several times used in the New Testament, may not unnaturally denote, that in the illimitable expansion, called heaven, there are various worlds, inhabited by intelligent beings. All these are, it would seem from the Scriptures, in some manner or other, and in a degree not unimportant, interested in the mediation of Christ; in such a degree as to be united by it in one vast, harmonious, and happy society. Christ is said to be *head over all things to the church*. The Father is also said to *reconcile all things by him unto himself, whether they be things upon the earth, or things in heaven*, εν τοις ουρανοις, *in the heavens*, Col. i. 20. It is also declared, that Christ *ascended far above all heavens, that he might fill all things;* υπερανω παντων των ουρανων, *far above all the heavens*. Of God the Father it is also declared, that it is his purpose *to gather together*, or reunite, *under one head in Christ, all things, both those which are in the heavens,* and those which are upon the earth, even in him.*

From these passages it is I think reasonably concluded, that other worlds beside the supreme heaven are denoted by this phraseology; that all these worlds will ultimately find an interest, and an important one, in the mediation of the Redeemer; will be gathered under one head in him, be filled by him with his fulness, and be brought by him into a nearer union with God the Father.

* Greek.

Should these things be admitted, it will be evident, that in this world there exists a singular and astonishing system of providence; a system of mediation between God and his revolted creatures, of grace and forgiveness on his part, and of faith, repentance, and new obedience, on theirs. This system, never found elsewhere, is accomplished here; and at the time referred to is by the text, taken in its relation with the context, declared to be finished.

Particularly, the mediatorial kingdom, set up in this world, and extending over all things in the universe, is at this time brought to a termination. Christ, the ruler in it, *having put down all* opposing *rule, authority, and power,* will now *deliver up this kingdom to God even the Father, that God may be all in all.*

At this time also all the race of Adam will have existed; and finished the part alloted to them. The whole number, both of the good and of the evil, will have been completed.

Sin will have appeared in every permitted form; and have been perpetrated in every mode in which it can exist without ultimate injury to the divine kingdom.

Virtue also will have been exhibited in all those diversities of beauty and loveliness which can furnish a proper foundation for the endlessly various rewards destined to exist in the future world.

Grace will have been displayed towards every proper object; the endless multitude of the first-born will have been gathered in; and the glorious register of immortality, contained in the *Lamb's book of life,* will have been written out to the last line.

The final trial also will be ended; the final sentence pronounced; and the final allotments of the righteous and the wicked settled for ever.

The purposes for which this world was made will therefore have all been accomplished: and for such a world there will be no more use in the divine kingdom. No longer necessary, and too humble and deformed a nature to be a proper part of the future system, it will be blotted out from among the works of God. In its place new heavens and a new earth will rise into being, destined to be the eter-

nal habitation of righteousness, and suited to a new and superior system of dispensations.

II. *This wonderful work will be brought into existence by means of the mediation of Christ.*

In my Father's house, saith the Saviour, *are many mansions. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.* And again, *Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me; and the glory which thou hast given me have I given them, that they may be one, even as we are one.*

From these passages it is evident, that *the state of glory in the future world is given to Christ as a proper consequence,* or, in what I deem more correct language, *the proper reward of his mediation.* It is a state of things which otherwise would not have existed. On his obedience it is founded; and to reward that obedience was it created. To his followers it is a gift made by his bounty. *The glory which thou hast given me have I given them.*

That it will be *the proper* reward of Christ's mediation; *such a reward as infinite wisdom pronounces to be a suitable recompense for such obedience of such a person;* will I presume not be questioned.

Had Adam passed through his trial with perfect obedience; both he and his posterity would undoubtedly have enjoyed a happy immortality in the present world. But if it would have been proper, that God should communicate such a mass of enjoyment as a reward of the obedience of the *first Adam, who is of the earth, earthy;* what must be the nature of a proper reward for the obedience of the *second Adam,* who *is the Lord from heaven;* an obedience infinitely meritorious, and deserving therefore the highest recompense which is possible? *All things are yours,* says St. Paul, *whether things present, or things to come; and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's.* All things are yours, because ye are Christ's, and because Christ is God's.

III. *It is evident, that this will be the final state of the universe.*

To what has been already said concerning this subject, I shall add a few observations.

It is not conceivable, that any other state can with propriety succeed that which is instituted to reward the Son of God for the most wonderful of all labours and sufferings. No other obedience can come after his, without infinite disadvantage; and no state of things be established as a reward of such obedience, without an incomprehensible diminution of happiness and glory. Such an inversion of the dictates of wisdom, such an anticlimax of order and beauty, cannot be supposed. Indeed, no other obedience but his can be supposed materially to affect the divine kingdom in any extensive manner: while that of Christ will be easily conceived to extend its influence through eternity and immensity; to change in any supposable degree the whole creation of God; and to become the foundation of every possible improvement in prosperity and splendour.

Accordant with this scheme are all the representations of Scripture which pertain to the subject. *Who created all things*, says St. Paul, *by Jesus Christ, to the intent that now unto principalities and powers, in the heavenly places, might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God.* Eph. iii. 10. Here the dispensations of God to the church, founded on the mediation of Christ, and existing only through this mediation, are exhibiting as being essential to the end for which all things were created. Plainly therefore all things are essentially affected by Christ's mediation. Here also it is declared, that *the intent* or purpose, for which God created all things, was to display, by means of these dispensations, *his manifold wisdom to principalities and powers in the heavenly places;* that is, the world where they dwell, and the worlds where from time to time they are employed. The knowledge of these glorious persons therefore, concerning the divine wisdom and its displays, will be supremely derived from this source; and their understanding will be chiefly employed in learning the nature and the endless consequences of this mediation. By means of their knowledge of this subject, also, will their virtues be principally quickened and ennobled; and their happiness rendered exquisite, intense, and complete.

Thus the mediation of Christ will affect the universe in such a manner, throughout immensity and eternity, as to render it a widely different thing from what it otherwise would have been. The dispensations of God will be widely different; the character of its virtuous inhabitants will be different; their knowledge, virtue, glory, and happiness, will be wonderfully superior; more exalted, more refined, more perfect. Plainly therefore this state of things will be final. In accordance with this view of the subject it is said, that the righteous *shall live and reign with Christ for ever and ever;* that *there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying, neither any more pain;* that the life which the righteous enjoy is *everlasting;* that *nothing shall be able to separate them from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord; and that all things, both present and future, are theirs.* Hence God styles himself *their God;* and declares them to be *his people.*

That a final state is an eternal one will not be questioned by any man who reads and believes the Scriptures. Whatever blessings then the righteous may obtain in the future world, all these blessings will continue for ever.

IV. *It will be an unchangeable state.*

Sin, under the system of dispensations preceding the judgment, will have had its whole course and its whole effect upon the universe, so far as a state of trial is concerned; and will never more exist, except in a state of punishment, and as an awful example to virtuous beings. The righteous will have passed through the same period of trial; and will have *washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.* They will begin the endless state of reward with a fixed character of holiness or virtue; and will never more return to sin. Every day, hour, and moment, as they move on in the progress of endless duration, they will, in the most exact sense, *love the Lord their God with all their heart, and with all their soul, and with all their strength, and with all their understanding: and they will love each other as themselves.* Every external duty also to which this disposition prompts, or which the pleasure of God directs, they will perform without failure, and without

defect; and will thus be *spirits of men* absolutely *just*, made absolutely *perfect*.

All the circumstances and consequences connected with this character will possess the same immutable nature. These virtuous beings will begin the possession of happiness and glory, to continue only happy and glorious for ever. Death, and sorrow, and crying, and pain, will be no more; and the last tear will have been wiped away by the divine hand from every eye. The good found will be always complete; the vessel always full; and the contents free from every mixture. Loss, danger, and fear, will be alike unknown. The immense of duration will be an unclouded everlasting day.

It is not however here intended, that this state will in the absolute sense be uniform. The Scriptures teach us, that it will be perpetually improving. Diminution it will never know. Increase and enhancement it will experience without end.

V. *It will be a state in the proper sense new to the universe.*

The heaven of heavens particularly will in many respects become new.

A great part of its inhabitants will be *the general assembly and church of the first-born.* These are all recovered and restored sinners. Originally, no rational beings were subjects of virtue and happiness beside those *who kept their first estate.* No others were objects of the eternal favour of God. Endless woe is the proper desert of sin; and persistency in endless turpitude is probably an essential part of its nature. To see a sinner then, especially to see a multitude of sinners which no man can number, recovered from their apostacy; restored to holiness; justified, accepted, made inhabitants of heaven; walking in the light of that happy world; and mingling with angels in their communion, their enjoyments, and their praise; will, of all events in the providential system, be to the virtuous universe the most unexpected, surprising, and delightful. *There is joy in heaven,* saith our Saviour, *over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, who need no re-*

pentance. What then will be the gratulation, the transport, the songs of triumph, when the penitence, not of an individual only, but of innumerable millions, shall be announced to this benevolent world! With what ecstacy will every bosom heave, when, not the tidings of this restoration are rehearsed, but the happy beings themselves who have experienced it have actually arrived; are presented before the throne of God; and begin the everlasting song, *Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God, even his Father, unto him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.*

The universe also, for the first time since the apostacy of angels, *will be in peace.* To this period rebellion will have existed, and war been carried on in the kingdom of JEHOVAH. But after the entrance of the righteous into heaven, all these evils will be settled in uninterrupted quiet. Animosity, contention, and confusion, will no more invade the regions of virtue, nor disturb the harmony of their inhabitants. *And I saw a new heaven and a new earth,* says St. John, *for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away, and there was no more sea.* The *sea* is chosen by the prophetical writers as an image of those violences, which are so prevalent and so universal here, and to which its own restless agitations bear so strong a resemblance. These, it is here asserted, will exist no more. In the future world of enjoyment, no cloud will overcast the sky; no tempest will rage; no billows will roll. Peace, divine and eternal, will breathe her balmy influence through every bosom, and hush the voice of contention for ever.

At the same time, the mediatorial kingdom will be terminated; and all the immediate purposes of this wonderful system accomplished. His chosen ones will be all gathered. Not one of them, however poor, humble, or despised, will be lost. Not one of them will be prevented from arriving in this glorious kingdom. Every one will see his infirmities, sins, and dangers, vanish for ever.

At this era, God, in a new sense, will be *all in all.* In other words, his perfections will be manifested with a clearness and splendour before unknown.

Particularly, the former dispensations of his providence

will be unfolded to the contemplation and comprehension of virtuous beings. These dispensations, it will be remembered, were merely means adopted for the promotion of ends to be accomplished in the future world. The fitness of their adoption for these purposes, as well as the wisdom of their Author, cannot therefore be thoroughly understood until the ends for which they exist shall take place. At this era they will begin to be clearly disclosed. All of them will now appear to have been necessary, wise, and good; and will shew beyond a doubt, that he who selected them was *wonderful in counsel, excellent in working, wise in heart, and mighty in strength.*

The beauty, glory, and happiness, of virtuous beings will also be only a new and illustrious manifestation of the perfections of God. Their bodies and their minds will be his workmanship; archetypes of those infinitely various forms of beauty, glory, and loveliness, which, like the colours of light in the sun, shone and mingled with immortal splendour in the uncreated mind. Their virtues will be only unceasing emanations of his excellence; their enjoyments only perennial streams, flowing from the eternal fountain of good.

In them all also he will live, and breathe, and move. The animating principle, a vernal warmth, an ethereal fire, imperceptible in itself, but gloriously visible in its effects, will spread without intermission through the virtuous universe; and quicken all things which it contains. The air, the trees, the streams, the fruits, will all be informed with life. This divine principle, in the glorified bodies of the blessed, will warm the heart, kindle the eye, and play around the aspect, with youth and immortality. The soul it will invigorate with energy which knows no decay; will glow in its affections; and supply it with strength to form vast conceptions, and to model plans and purposes for eternity. All things will be full of life; and the life in all things will be God.

Finally, a new system of dispensations will here commence, incomparably more glorious than any thing and every thing which has before existed. Christ is the light of heaven, as well as of earth. In this divine Person, the Godhead will shine without a cloud, and be seen face to face.

The splendour will be all intelligence and enjoyment, and the warmth, life and love. The happy millions will bask for ever in the benevolent beams; and with the eagle's eye fixed on the divine luminary, will rise on eagle's wings, with a perpetual invigorated flight, nearer and nearer to the Sun of righteousness for ever.

SERMON CLXX.

THE REMOTER CONSEQUENCES OF DEATH.

THE HAPPINESS OF HEAVEN.

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away: and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven, saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.—REV. XXI. 1—3.

IN the preceding discourse, I endeavoured to give a summary view of *the new creation*, or *the new heavens and the new earth*, mentioned in the beginning of the text. In this, I propose to consider briefly, *the particular state of the redeemed in their future existence*, for whom principally the Scriptures exhibit the glorious state of the universe, which was the subject of the preceding discourse, as being accomplished. For them particularly heaven is formed and furnished to be their everlasting residence. *In my Father's house*, said our Saviour, *are many mansions, I go to prepare a place for you. Come, ye blessed of my Father*, will the Judge say to the righteous at the final day, *inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.* To

complete this world of glory, to adorn it with unrivalled beauty, to store it with the richest blessings, to fill it with the most proper inhabitants, and to reign over it with peculiar displays of his perfection for ever, is, I think, sufficiently exhibited in the Scriptures as the end especially proposed by the Creator in all his antecedent dispensations. That heaven was created to become the residence of those by whom it will be inhabited, and to become the theatre of those glorious dispensations which will constitute the eternal providence of God towards them, will not I suppose be questioned. It has been shewn, that the display of the divine *wisdom to principalities and powers in the heavenly places*, by means of the church, was *the intent* for which *God created all things by Jesus Christ.* It will not be doubted, that this display will be chiefly made in the heavenly world, rather than in this; and more extensively and perfectly during the endless progress of future ages, than during the momentary continuance of time. For the same end existed the work of redemption. For this end also mankind are born; angels employed as ministering spirits, to minister to them who are the heirs of salvation; the revolutions of time finished; *the judgment set;* the world consumed by fire; and the new heavens and the new earth created as the eternal habitation of righteousness. Of course, this state is sufficiently glorious to justify these amazing labours, and the existence of that wonderful train of events which they accomplish. The first heaven and the first earth were intended to be the theatre of temporary scenes; and when these are finished, are declared in the text to pass away. The new heaven and the new earth are destined to eternal purposes; and are therefore formed to endure for ever.

The two last chapters of the Apocalypse are a discourse written chiefly on this great subject. No descriptive writing in the possession of mankind can be compared with this in sublimity and splendour. The most beautiful and the most magnificent objects which were ever presented to the imagination of man, are here selected with unrivalled skill, and combined with supreme felicity. Every stroke is the strong masterly effort of a great mind, filled with the immense grandeur of the subject, and giving vent to the won-

ders and glories of inspiration; every where invigorated with that conciseness which is so characteristical of the Scriptures, and especially of their sublimest effusions. It is equally distinguished for the particularity of imagery and phraseology which is indispensable to all vivid powerful impressions. Little and ordinary things, nay, such as may be styled great, but are yet possessed of secondary splendour, are here forgotten, or purposely left to be supplied by the mind of the reader; while the writer employs himself in exhibiting those only which are eminently important, intensely beautiful, or gloriously majestic.

This discourse of St. John may perhaps with equal propriety be considered as a description of a *place*, which, with its appendages, is denominated *the heaven of heavens*, or *the New Jerusalem;* or of *the state of things existing in that delightful region;* as an account of *the future character and happiness of the church;* or *the divine residence, where it will dwell, and its happiness be enjoyed.* It is of little consequence therefore in which manner the discourse is understood.

Of this discourse the text is the introduction, and contains several interesting declarations concerning its illustrious subject. The writer commences his observations by informing us, that after the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, he saw a new heaven and a new earth brought into existence; the same which St. Peter declares to be expected by himself and his fellow-Christians after the conflagration. In these happy regions, he also informs us, tumults and confusion would never find a place, *there was no more sea.* Then he announces to us, he *saw the holy city, New Jerusalem,* a magnificent emblem of the future state and residence of the redeemed, *coming down from God out of heaven.* This city *was prepared as a bride adorned for her husband;* or in other words, ornamented with every variety and degree of beauty and splendour. A great voice from heaven proclaimed, that this was *the tabernacle,* or peculiar dwelling-place, *of God;* that it should henceforth exist with men through all succeeding ages of duration; and that *God would* henceforth *dwell with them and be their God, and that they should be his people.* In other words, the voice declared, that the covenant made with Abraham,

and afterward repeatedly promulged to the church, should now be fulfilled in all its import, and to the utmost extent of the blessing conveyed in those memorable words, *I will be your God, and ye shall be my people.*

Soon after St. John was carried by an angel, in the spirit, to a great and high mountain; where at leisure he surveyed the same illustrious object; and beheld in distinct vision, and contemplated separately, the wonderful parts of this astonishing structure, and all its magnificent appendages. His description of these he concludes with this remarkable declaration; *And there shall in nowise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie; but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life.* For the redeemed, then, heaven is formed and constituted; and all its blessings unite to complete their happy state in the future world.

The observations which I propose to make concerning this interesting subject, I shall arrange under the following heads.

I. *The residence;*

II. *The character;*

III. *The employments;* and,

IV. *The enjoyments; of the redeemed.*

In the first place, *The residence of these happy beings claims our particular attention.*

No man, it is presumed, ever read the history of our first parents, contained in the second chapter of Genesis, without being deeply interested in their *state*, as well as their *character*. The paradise allotted to them as their proper residence, has in a high degree engaged the attention and awakened the delight of every reader. Its trees and fruits; its fields arrayed in verdure, and adorned with flowers; the life which breathed in its winds, and flowed in its rivers: the serenity of its sky, and the splendour of its sunshine: together with the immortality which gilded and burnished all its beautiful scenes, have filled the heart with rapture, and awakened the most romantic visions of the imagination. The poets of the west, and still more those of the east, have, down to the present hour, kindled at the thought of this scene of beauty and fragrance; and the very name of Eden has met the eye, as a gem in the verse which it adorned.

Nay, it has been transferred by God himself to the world of glory; and become one of the appropriate designations of heaven. *To him that overcometh,* saith our Saviour, *I will give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.*

If the earthly paradise has been so delightful to the human mind; if the human heart has ever sighed over the loss of this happy residence; it must certainly be a more delightful as well as a more rational employment to contemplate a paradise wonderfully superior both in its nature and duration. Peculiarly will this enployment be proper, consolatory, and edifying, to him who, feeling himself a pilgrim and stranger in the present world, looks for a permanent residence beyond the grave, *a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.*

The heavenly paradise is formed for eternity; and will in every respect deserve to continue through this immense duration. It is intended to be the scene in which the infinitely glorious obedience of Christ will find its reward; and will itself be a proper part of that reward, and one honourable testimony of his Father's complacency in that divine work. *The marriage-supper of the Lamb,* the great festival of the universe, is now to be holden; and the house of God will be adorned with all the beauty and splendour which can become this great day, and the character of this wonderful person. The prayer of Cnrist for his followers, contained in these remarkable words, *And the glory which thou hast given me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one; I in them, and thou in me; that they may be made perfect in one. Father, I will, that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me:* this prayer will now begin to be fulfilled in its proper import. All the redeemed will now be gathered in this happy place; and the perfect union between them and the Saviour will commence. They will begin *to behold his glory,* and to possess *the glory which he has given them.* That *manifestation of the sons of God* will now be made, which *the whole creation* has earnestly and anxiously expected to this time. This is the period in which all things will begin to be theirs: the things of this world, by an instructive and delightful re-

collection: the things of that which is to come, by exquisite and unlimited enjoyment. Of course, whatever material beauty, greatness, and glory, can furnish; whatever *their* luminous minds can understand or enjoy of this nature; will now begin to be lavished on them with a bounty becoming the character of God.

Perfectly correspondent with these views of the subject is the description of the New Jerusalem, contained in this discourse of St. John. The foundations of the heavenly city are garnished with all manner of precious stones. Its dimensions are wonderfully great. Its wall is of jasper. Its buildings are of pure and pellucid gold: its gates are pearls: its watchmen are angels. The throne of God and the Lamb is in the midst of it. Out of this throne proceeds the river of life, and on its banks stands the tree of life, yielding the various fruits of immortality. No temple is found here. No night overcasts the sky. No moon shines. No sun arises. *The Lord God Almighty, and the Lamb, are the temple* of this divine residence; the Sun which shines with the spendour of everlasting day.

Into these mansions, *there shall in nowise enter any thing that defileth, or that worketh abomination, or that maketh a lie.* There will be nothing to deceive, nothing to pollute, nothing to awaken disgust or abhorrence. Every sinner and every sin will be finally excluded. Rebellion will have spent its force; the iron rod of oppression will be broken; the trumpet will have blown its final blast; the last shout of battle will have expired; *destructions* will have *come to a perpetual end.* Tumult, suspense, and fear, will be no more. The minds of these happy inhabitants will never more be assailed by temptation. No lusts will rankle within; no enemies will seduce without.

Private separate interests will be felt and known no more. The universal good will allure every eye, engross every heart, and move every hand. Peace therefore, *not in word nor in tongue, but in deed and in truth;* the peace of minds; the harmony of views; the unison of affections, will spread over all the millions who inhabit this land of promise; and diffuse a universal and an eternal serenity within and without the soul.

Here also all things will *live.* Death and sorrow, disease

and pain, crying and tears, will have fled for ever. There will be nothing to destroy, nothing to impair, nothing to lament. Every thing will live; and not merely live, but grow, and flourish, and bloom, without interruption. Life in a sublime and superior sense, life vernal and immortal, will impregnate the streams and trees, the leaves and fruits; and animate the bodies and minds of the first-born. A glorious antitype will be found here of the wheel seen by Ezekiel in the vision of the cherubim. One spirit, you will remember, one life, informed both; for the spirit of life was in the wheels, as well as in the cherubim.

As all things in heaven will be informed with life; so they will become universally means of *joy*. The present world is justly styled *a vale of tears*. Distress awaits us here in a thousand forms. Within us it dwells; without, it assails. We are sinners, are the subjects of ungratified desire, disappointment, discontent, reproaches of conscience, and distressing apprehensions concerning the anger of God. At the same time our frail bodies are subjected to the evils of hunger and thirst, of cold and heat, of weariness and languor, of sickness and pain, of decay and death. Our friends and families are in want, pain, and sorrow: they sicken and die: their sins disgrace *them*, and wound *us;* and awaken excruciating apprehensions concerning their destiny beyond the grave. War also frequently spreads wide the miseries of dismay, plunder, slaughter, and devastation. To beings habituated to a state of existence so extensively formed of these distressing materials, how welcome must be the change which transports them from this world to heaven! When *the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to* the celestial *Zion with songs; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.* Heaven is created to be the residence of happiness. Every thing which it contains will be beauty, grandeur, and glory, to the eye; harmony to the ear; and rapture to the heart; rapture which admits no mixture, and knows no termination.

II. THE CHARACTER OF THE RIGHTEOUS *in the future world may be illustrated in the following manner.*

They are beings composed of body and mind. Their

bodies I have described in the discourse on the resurrection; and shall only add here, that they will be means of increasing essentially both the power and the enjoyment of their minds; so that they will be happier after the reunion of these two great constituents of their existence than before. In the present world, our bodies are full of imperfection; possessed of obtuse faculties; furnishing us information with difficulty, and in parts and parcels; sluggish in their nature, and heavy in all their movements. By disease also and accident their own powers are impaired; and with them those of the mind. Even when these evils do not exist, age brings on certain decay, weakens every power, and blunts every perception.

But in the world of glory, the body, as was formerly observed, will become a spiritual body; possessed of a perfection corresponding altogether with that of the mind. By means of it, the mind will perceive more clearly, enjoy more exquisitely, and act more usefully, than it would do if disembodied.

It is not here intended that minds need, in the metaphysical sense, the possession of bodies to complete their happiness; or that saints hereafter will enjoy a felicity superior to that of angels. It is only intended, that this is one way in which God is pleased to make happiness perfect; and that saints themselves will be in a state of higher perfection than if they were unembodied. Of this it is apprehended the evidence is entire in the great fact, that Christ will reign for ever in his own glorified body: for it will not be supposed, that his *human nature* will by this fact be rendered less glorious.

The redeemed are also just men made perfect. The word *perfect* is differently understood. It may be proper therefore to observe, that I intend by it, not a state of existence which admits of no accession to the powers of the mind, its attainments, or its enjoyments. The infinite mind only is perfect in this sense. I intend, that state in which the mind will be the subject neither of fault nor error, neither of decay nor weariness; in which there will be nothing to lessen its usefulness, or impair its enjoyment; in which it will be entirely approved by itself, and entirely loved by its Maker; in which it will fill a station and act a part in

divine kingdom, altogether necessary, desirable, and honourable; and will perform these things perfectly and better than they would be performed by any other being whatever. This, if I mistake not, is the perfection of angels, and the perfection of those who are declared by Christ to be ισαγγελοι, *equal, or like, to angels.* Both will however improve in their attainments and in their attributes also for ever.

They are redeemed. They have all been apostates, rebels, and outcasts; and were once *children of wrath, because they were children of disobedience.* They were all therefore condemned by the law of God; and, had they been left to themselves, must have perished for ever. Every one of them also was *turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God;* was renewed by the divine goodness, and the mysterious influence of the Spirit of grace. Every one of them *was* once *lost* to the virtuous universe, and has again been *found.*

Thus they are a new order of beings in the divine kingdom: beings restored from endless sin to endless holiness, and raised from absolute perdition to immortal life. How amazing the change; how immense the deliverance! so amazing, so literally immense, that eternity will scarcely be sufficient to unfold *the height, the length, and the breadth,* of this unexampled dispensation.

In this character the Redeemer will behold them for ever, as the peculiar reward of his mediation, the trophies of his cross, and the gems in his crown of glory. Throughout the ages of heaven he will look on every one as an immortal mind, to save which from endless turpitude and ruin he shed his own most precious blood; as a mind, recovered by himself to the divine kingdom, reinstamped by his Spirit with the image of God, and thus furnished with an indefeasible title to eternal glory.

They are adopted children of God. The relation expressed in these terms is neither fanciful nor figurative; but real, acknowledged by God, and inestimably important. In the covenant of grace he was pleased to promise, *that he would be their God, and that they should be his people;* that he would be *a Father to them;* and that they should be *his sons and daughters.* This covenant he will now completely fulfil; this relation he will now consummate in the

sight of the universe. He will acknowledge them as *heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ* to his kingdom and glory; *to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away;* an inheritance *eternal in the heavens; a kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world.* Christ, says St. Paul, Heb. ii. 11, *is not ashamed to call them brethren. God,* says the same apostle, Heb. xi. 16, *is not ashamed to be called their God.*

They are brethren to each other. In this character they will behold each other as made of one blood, and as sprung from the same loins: as redeemed from sin and misery by the death of the Son of God; as renewed by the same Spirit of truth; as fellow-members of the same church; as fellow-travellers in the same journey towards heaven; as ruined by the same apostacy, recovered by the same mercy, and heirs of the same glorious inheritance. How many bonds of endearment and union are here presented to our view! How intimate are these relations! How important in their nature! What sources of attachment! What indissoluble ligaments do they form for the heart! What intense endearment must they awaken! What delightful offices of love must they inspire!

They are also companions of angels. Ye are come, says St. Paul, with the anticipating spirit of prophecy, *Ye are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem: and to an innumerable company of angels. And round about the throne,* says St. John, *were four-and-twenty seats, and upon the seats I saw four-and-twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold. And before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal. And in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four living ones, full of eyes both before and behind.* In this passage, the same station is allotted to the representatives of the church, and the representatives of the angelic host.

Throughout every part of the same book, angels and glorified saints are exhibited as dwelling together in the same glorious mansions, occupied in the same employments, and united in the same praise. When the four living ones cry, *Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty!*

who wast, and who art, and who art to come; the four-and-twenty elders fall down before him that sitteth on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever; and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honour, and power; for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.

The angel interpreter also, whom St. John, astonished and bewildered by the vision of the New Jerusalem, attempted to worship, replied to him in these remarkable words: *See thou do it not. I am thy fellow-servant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them who keep the sayings of this book.* No words could more completely evince the truth of the doctrine under consideration.

Angels, as I have formerly shewn, are the first of all created beings, in worth, dignity, and glory. To be the companions of these exalted intelligences, these most favoured creatures of God, must plainly be a privilege which words will in vain labour to describe, and imagination to conceive.

Finally. *They are kings and priests unto God.* In the discourses just now alluded to, I have exhibited, very imperfectly indeed, the dignity and glory of the stations which angels occupy in the divine kingdom. The saints who will hereafter be their companions, will occupy similar stations. The name *priest* in this declaration, indicates *the distinguished purity of their character;* and teaches us, that their thoughts, affections, and purposes, will be an unceasing and eternal offering of sweet incense in the sanctuary of heaven. The name *king,* denotes *their distinguished honour;* and informs us, that they will hereafter be elevated to princely employments and peculiar dignities in the empire of JEHOVAH. *To him that overcometh,* says our Saviour, *will I grant to sit with me in my throne; even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne;* Rev. iii. 21. *They shall reign,* said the interpreting angel to John, when describing the future happiness of the righteous, *They shall reign for ever and ever.*

REMARKS.

1. *These considerations illustrate in the strongest manner the goodness of God.*

The blessings which have been summarily mentioned in this discourse, are all created and bestowed by the Infinite Hand, and contrived by the Infinite Mind. They are the best of all blessings, immeasurable in their value, in their multitude numberless, in their duration eternal. To give such blessings as these to any beings, even the greatest and most excellent, would be an exertion of bounty which could not fail to claim our high admiration. Here they are given to the humblest class of intelligent creatures, a great part of whom have held their earthly course along the line which forms the lowest limit of moral agency; and, during their residence in this world, have always travelled along the verge of animal nature. Nor is this all, they are given to apostates, excommunicated by themselves from the assembly of virtuous beings, voluntary aliens from the divine kingdom, useless to their Creator, and nuisances to his creation.

Why are they given to all? To this question no answer can be returned, but that they are the mere overflowings of unlimited goodness. Why, above all, are they given to such beings as have been here described? To give in this glorious manner to those who are possessed of the highest created worth, between whose character and rewards there is a perceptible degree of congruity, evidences a bountiful disposition, whose extent and excellence are plainly incomprehensible. But our conceptions of the glory of this disposition are mightily enhanced, when we behold these blessings flowing in uninterrupted and eternal streams to beings who have forfeited all good, and who were destined to drink the cup of bitterness for ever. *Oh give thanks unto the Lord,* said David, *for he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever! Who remembered us in our low estate, and hath redeemed us from our enemies; for his mercy endureth for ever! Oh give thanks unto the God of heaven, for his mercy endureth for ever.*

2. *These considerations very forcibly impress upon the mind the glory of Christ in the work of redemption.*

When we read those passages of Scripture in which the future happiness of the righteous is exhibited, we are struck with astonishment at the strength and splendour of the exhibition. I do not remember, that in all the conversations which I have heard concerning this subject, a single individual has, in any instance, given me reason to suppose, that he considered the scriptural declarations concerning it as intended to be fulfilled in the strict sense. Numerous as they are, and uniform as their tenor is, they appear, so far as I have observed, universally to be regarded as pictures intentionally overdrawn; as poetical efforts, beautiful indeed, and sublime, in an eminent degree, but rendered, by the imagination of the writer, bold, fervid, and hyperbolical, in such a manner as not to be received without many limitations. With this general view of the subject I am persuaded most persons rest satisfied, and thus regard heaven as a state somewhat happier than that of Eden; but substantially the same with that which mankind would have enjoyed, had their progenitor continued steadfast in his obedience. But with these conceptions, every person who pleases may see there is no accordance in the Scriptures.

What has given birth to such conceptions, appears to me plainly to be the apprehension, universally diffused, that these wonderful blessings cannot with propriety be dispensed to such beings as men are, even in their best estate.

The righteous, as well as the wicked, are, in the Scriptures, said to *be rewarded according to their works.* The wicked, it will be remembered, are rewarded *for* their works, as well as *according to* them. But this cannot be said of the righteous, unless in a very humble and very remote sense. The righteous are saved from perdition, and rewarded with eternal life, solely on account of the obedience of Christ. Their own works *are merely the proportional measures of their reward.* All are alike interested in the righteousness of Christ, and are therefore alike entitled to a reward. But there is a real and considerable difference in the degrees of excellence which they severally obtain and exhibit; and this difference, we are taught by

the Scriptures, as reason would naturally teach us, will become the foundation of a difference in their future allotments. Christians, I believe universally, are sufficiently ready to admit, that their escape from hell, and their admission to heaven, are blessings owed wholly to the obedience of Christ, and in no sense merited by themselves. Still, I suspect, that few of them ask what that heaven is; that degree of happiness which will be the proper consequence of Christ's obedience, and a suitable reward for its transcendent worth. Had Adam obeyed, his posterity would have inherited a happy immortality. Few Christians, I am persuaded, ever inquire concerning the nature and blessings of this happy immortality, or of that which will suitably reward the obedience of the second Adam. Thus, considering heaven merely as a happy immortality, acknowledging themselves to be admitted to it on account of Christ's righteousness; and yet supposing, that the kind and degree of happiness will, in some indefinite manner or other, be suited to the nature and value of their own obedience; they think that heaven, so far at least as themselves are concerned, must be a state of comparatively moderate enjoyment. Without supposing themselves therefore to disbelieve, and without disbelieving in fact the truth of revelation, without calling in question intentionally or perceptibly to themselves any passage of Scripture; they suffer not a little of that which is revealed concerning the glory of heaven to stand for nothing.

To this mode of thinking the humility of good men powerfully contributes. They cannot realize that themselves, stained as they are with guilt, nor that any men, were they even perfect, can be admitted to such enjoyments as those which are unfolded in the promises of the gospel. The distance between the reward and the character of the recipient is too great; the change is too absolute and wonderful to be admitted into the mind. "Is it possible," will a man of this character instinctively ask, "that such a one as I should inherit enjoyments of this transcendent nature?"

To the same current of thought, that so-frequently-quoted text has probably contributed not a little, although in an

indirect manner: *Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.* It would seem that most of those who have quoted this text, have made a full stop at the conclusion of the verse. Had they proceeded to the very next words, they would have found them the following: *But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit.* Whatever may be the things which are here declared to have been unseen, unheard, and unimagined, St. Paul informs us, that *they* are revealed to us by the Spirit of God; and, since the time of this revelation, are therefore not unknown to us, unless through our negligence. Still, I believe, this text has put a kind of negative, in the minds of very many Christians, upon most of their inquiries concerning the heavenly state. Under the influence of this declaration they seem to have supposed, that the Bible must of course be silent concerning this subject, and to have wandered over the passages where it is mentioned, without stopping to ask what was their meaning. In their meditations on the future felicity of the righteous, they seem to have drawn up this conclusion, that it is something indefinitely and indescribably great indeed, but left for their imaginations to form as well as they can, and their hearts to hope, rather than something to an important degree unfolded in the word of God.

To me all this appears unhappy. No reason, it is presumed, can be given, why in this, any more than in other cases, we should limit the word of God by our own views, and interpret its declarations according to the dictates, either of our feelings or our philosophy. It is undoubtedly to be admitted, that the rewards of the righteous in the future state, are wonderfully disproportioned to any worth of which they can boast. But this ought to occasion no surprise when we remember, that *the reward is not of debt, but of grace;* that we are not only justified, but glorified also, solely on account of the obedience of the Redeemer. If this consideration be kept in view, we cannot, I think, hesitate to admit, that all which is declared in the gospel concerning this subject, may be strictly just without exaggeration. St. Paul has certainly removed every dif-

ficulty which might have hung upon it, and every perplexity with which our considerations of it are attended. *He*, says this apostle, triumphantly discussing it in the eighth chapter of Romans, *He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?* The righteous, the virtue which constitutes their character, and the happiness to which it is entitled, are all given to Christ in the covenant of redemption, because *he made his soul an offering for sin.* They *are the seed which*, it is promised, *should prolong their days*, or be happy for ever. In them he sees *the fruit of the travail of his soul, and is satisfied therewith.* Here *the gracious purpose of* JEHOVAH *prospers in his hands** perfectly and for ever.

When we consider the subject in this manner; the difficulties which seem to attend it vanish. He who believes, that in consequence of the obedience of Adam, his posterity would have enjoyed immortal life in a paradisiacal world; cannot rationally doubt, that in consequence of the obedience of Christ, his followers will enjoy all the blessings promised in the heaven of the Scriptures. He will cease to be surprised when he hears the Saviour say, *Father, I will that they whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory. And the glory which thou gavest me have I given them:* or to hear him say, *He that overcometh shall inherit all things:* or to hear him say, *To him that overcometh, will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.* He will no more wonder to find St. Paul declaring to the Corinthians, *All things are yours: whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come, all are yours.* However strange this sublime declaration may seem, its mysteriousness will cease to perplex him, when he reads and considers the following verse, *and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's.*

But while these magnificent promises are thus explained by the mediation of Christ, they in return reflect the highest glory on that wonderful work. With what splendour and

* Isaiah liii. 10, 11. Lowth.

excellence must that obedience appear to the eye of God, which his wisdom thinks it proper to reward with the creation of *new heavens and a new earth;* the everlasting residence of righteousness, truth, happiness, and glory; with all the magnificence and all the enjoyments of the New Jerusalem; with the endless multitude of the first-born, given to him as his everlasting possession, arrayed in the splendour of knowledge and virtue, quickened by the smile of infinite complacency, and elevated to the summit of created glory. Even this is not all. *Of the increase of his government and peace,* that is, of the glory of his providence, and the prosperity of his subjects, *there shall be no end.* All things here, fair, great, and exalted, at first, will soften, refine, and harmonize, with ever-improving beauty, enlarge with perpetually increasing grandeur, and rise with a sublimity ascending for ever. With this prospect in full view, who will not exclaim how great, how good, how glorious, must he be, of whose wisdom and excellence all these things are only the proper reward!

SERMON CLXXI.

THE REMOTER CONSEQUENCES OF DEATH.

THE HAPPINESS OF HEAVEN.

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven, saying, Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.—REV. XXI. 1—3.

IN the preceding discourse, derived from these words, I proposed to consider,

I. *The residence;*
II. *The character;*
III. *The employments;* and,
IV. *The enjoyment; of the redeemed.*

The two first of these I examined in that discourse. two last I shall now make the subject of consideration.

Heaven is exhibited in the Scriptures as the world of joy and praise. The account here given is both rational and sublime. Still, if I mistake not, it is often made the foundation of views concerning heaven which are erroneous and unhappy. Unless I am deceived, it is a very common opinion, that to receive enjoyment and to praise the author of it, constitute chiefly, if not wholly, the state of existence allotted to the righteous in the future world. This opinion I suppose indeed to exist indefinitely and loosely; and without any decision of the mind, either that such will be the fact, or that such is its own opinion. Yet I suspect, that, if many persons, and those not of inferior understanding, were to be asked in what the happiness of heaven consists; the two particulars above mentioned would make up their answer. This I suspect, because I find these objects mentioned alone almost always when heaven becomes the theme of discourse.

To praise God for the perfections of his nature is unquestionably a universal and an eternal duty, as well as a delightful employment of intelligent creatures. Far be it from me to undervalue the importance or the excellence of this duty. To receive enjoyment also is unquestionably one great end for which intelligent creatures are made; and an end clearly worthy of their Maker. But the mode in which this enjoyment is attained, and the means of its accomplishment, are considerations of peculiar moment, both to the views which we form of the celestial happiness, and to the nature of the happiness itself.

The state of existence in heaven is not exhibited in the Scriptures *as a state of mere recipiency,* if I may be allowed the term, or *of mere quiescent enjoyment.* Glorified spirits are not, as I believe, mere vessels into which happiness is poured by the divine hand; *and do not merely enjoy what is thus communicated.* On the contrary, *they are the most active of all beings in the creation of God; the*

most laborious; and the most unremitting in their exertions. Out of this activity their happiness in a great measure springs.

Christ has taught us, that *it is more blessed to give than to receive;* that is, to communicate good to others, than to receive it from their hands. This great principle I have endeavoured to illustrate variously in several of these discourses; particularly in those *on the end for which man was created; on the foundation of virtue; and on the influence of virtue upon personal happiness.* In these discourses it was, I flatter myself, clearly proved, that to do good is to possess a higher and happier state of being, than that of merely receiving. If then, the state of the blessed is a state of mere recipiency; it is plainly and wonderfully inferior to such a state as we can see with certainty might easily exist: for nothing is more clear, than that a world *might* be created and filled with inhabitants, whose employment it would be to do good.

Again; Angels are the *present* inhabitants of heaven. Of all beings they are the most active, as I have endeavoured to shew when discoursing concerning their character. The present state of heaven, therefore, is a state of the most active and unwearied exertion. It cannot be believed, that when this glorious world is so far changed, as with propriety to be styled a new heaven, its inhabitants will be sunk from a higher to an inconceivably lower state of being.

If the observations which have been already made are allowed to be just, it must be clearly perceived, that the enjoyments of the righteous will rise to such a degree, out of their employments; and that these objects will be so necessarily, so frequently, and so extensively, blended together, as to render a distinct consideration of them both difficult and useless. I shall therefore blend my observations concerning them under the following heads:

1. *It will be one employment of the righteous, in the future world, to study the works, and learn the character, of God.*

It will not be denied, that this is the proper employment of *the intellect* possessed by rational beings; the purpose for which it was created. The end here proposed is the knowledge of God. The means by which it is accom-

plished are the study of his works. These, whether material or immaterial, all existed originally in the unc mind; and are all merely various means of disp infinite power, wisdom, and goodness.

Matter, however insignificant it may seem as a collection of atoms, assumes a very different character, when endued with its peculiar powers, arranged in an immense system, and operating to great and glorious purposes. In this view, it becomes capable of exhibiting the greatness and glory of JEHOVAH in a manner exceedingly sublime and wonderful. Accordingly, the divine writers, particularly the Psalmist, often make the objects constituting this part of the creation the themes of their wonder and praise.

In the material kingdom, particularly, we see beauty displayed in millions of forms and varieties; and novelty in every transition from object to object. Grandeur also and sublimity engross the imagination, in the mountain and the ocean, the tempest and the volcano, the sun, the moon, and the host of heaven. When we lift up our thoughts, by the aid of astronomy, to the solar system, and contemplate the sun as a vast central world, encircled by a host of other worlds, with their innumerable inhabitants; when we consider the universe as filled with suns, surrounded by similar worlds; still more if we regard all these as arranged into one vast harmonious system, suspended from the throne of God, and, amid all their apparent wanderings and mazes, moving for ever with perfect order around the heaven of heavens; we can want no proofs, that the material creation is sufficiently magnificent to become a most useful object of investigation to any created mind, however capacious, however dignified, however sublime, may be its powers of conception.

But the material creation is capable of becoming a still more interesting object of contemplation. It is a vast storehouse of means, all fitted, all operating, to the production of the best ends. In this world we daily see it the means of life, comfort, and usefulness; of instruction and warning; of admiration, gratitude, and praise, to ourselves. In other worlds it is, probably in a far higher degree, the means of excellence and enjoyment to their respective inhabitants: such as are capable of enlarging any mind with

both physical and moral science in a manner, which ages of ages will not enable us to comprehend. Above all, when we remember that God is the grandeur which every where spreads; the sublimity which rises; the beauty which glows; the life which animates; the wisdom which astonishes; and the goodness which provides, sustains, and rejoices; we shall see this field of contemplation and intelligence, not only exalted, immense, and endlessly improving, but literally divine.

The world of minds is, however, a far more august and glorious field of such contemplation. Minds are as much superior to matter, as thought and volition are superior to extension and solidity; and are the end for which matter was formed. The material creation is a sumptuous palace. Minds are its inhabitants; without which the mansion, with all its furniture, would be empty, solitary, and useless.

In the world of minds, all the sources of admiration and enjoyment are found in still higher degrees. They are endlessly diversified in thought, purpose, and action; and hence furnish to the eye novelty, presented to its view in an eternal succession. Minds are also intensely and divinely *beautiful.* Virtue, the beauty of the mind, derives this peculiar character from the gentle, serene, and sweet affections; and is of all attributes incomparably the most delightful. In a single mind, it is capable of diversities incomprehensible by us. What then must be its varieties in the whole intelligent creation! All these, it must be remembered, are varieties of *beauty only;* as light in all its different colours is still the same glorious element.

At the same time, minds are the noblest specimens of created *greatness.* This is especially seen in magnanimous affections, elevated sentiments, sublime conceptions, and the exalted actions to which they give birth. Even in the present world we are not absolute strangers to these illustrious objects. Heaven is the native country of all that is beautiful and magnificent. Virtue here exists in every beautiful, every noble form. Whatever is trifling, little, and low, is here precluded for ever. Here are seen and studied the beauty of the cherub, the dignity of the seraph, and the greatness of the archangel. Here also the Messiah presents, in a manner capable of being understood by

sanctified minds, the excellence and glory of JEHOVAH, the effulgence of the Sun of righteousness; reflected, softened, and brought down, to the comprehension of a limited understanding. All these objects, it is to be remembered, are seen in heaven by minds invested with new powers of discernment; and with an equally new, as well as intense, delight in the contemplation of the objects themselves.

The providence of God will become a still more glorious field of knowledge to the righteous in the future world.

The providence of God is the end for which the creation exists. Creation is merely a collection of means; immensely magnificent indeed; an astonishing display of contrivance; a sublime proof of almighty agency; but by itself inexplicable and useless. In providence, worlds do not barely exist, but operate to desirable purposes, and become the means of created wisdom, virtue, and happiness. In providence, minds do not barely possess being; but understand, design, act, love, and enjoy. Here the reasons are found, why such beings have existed in such places, times, and circumstances, and were endued with such powers and faculties. Here also is seen the government of God exerted over them; and the wisdom and goodness employed in his various dispensations. Providence, therefore, is the fairest and best display of infinite perfection.

In this world we are children standing on the bank of a mighty river. Casting our eyes upward and downward along the channel, we discern various windings of its current; and perceive that it is now visible, now obscure, and now entirely hidden from our view. But being far removed from the fountains whence it springs, and from the ocean into which it is emptied, we are unable to form any conceptions of the beauty, usefulness, or grandeur, of its progress. Lost in perplexity and ignorance, we gaze, wonder, and despond. In this situation a messenger from heaven comes to our relief, with authentic information of its nature, its course, and its end; conducts us backward to the fountains, and leads us forward to the ocean.

This river is the earthly system of Providence: the Bible is the celestial messenger: and heaven is the ocean in which all preceding dispensations find their end.

In that glorious world, no revelation will be needed to

illumine the thoughts of its inhabitants concerning the divine administrations. While they were here below; they *thought as children, they spake as children, and they reasoned as children;* but *now they have become men;* and have left behind them all *their childish imperfections.* Once *they knew in part;* now *they know even as they also are known.* Possessed of superior vision, the eye will here, with a direct and undeceiving survey, trace from the beginning the glorious dispensations of its Creator towards the various inhabitants of his boundless empire; will see them rise from little fountains; and, enlarging by continual additions, become mighty rivers. In all their progress, they will see good, both moral and natural, produced without intermission, and increasing without end: while the glory of the uncreated mind, dawning on the original darkness with a beautiful lustre, *shines* perpetually *more and more unto the perfect day.*

Here God will be seen as he is. Here also he will, in a sense, be all that is seen. In his presence, created glory will fade and be forgotten.

In heaven the mysteries of the present world will be finished. Every being and event will appear to have been known and chosen from the beginning, and to have been a proper part of a perfect system. It will be seen, that nothing was defective, and nothing superfluous; that sparrows fell to the ground, and that the hairs of our heads were numbered, according to the dictates of infinite wisdom. In a word, reasons of sufficient importance will be disclosed, why every thing was as it has actually been; and why the universe was not formed of different materials, or conducted in a different manner.

In the intelligent kingdom, particularly, will these delightful things be eminently visible. The knowledge, virtues, and actions, of saints and angels, will be the fairest images, the brightest copies, of supreme perfection; a resemblance which, through age succeeding age, will become more beautiful, more lovely, more divine. With the improvement of their excellence will his providence towards them exactly correspond; and, as their character becomes more exalted, his dispensations will assume a continually increasing splendour. The character of a great and wise

prince is most effectually learned from the wisdom of his laws; the arrangement of his officers and their employments; the magnificence of his court; the mildness and equity of his government; and the high honour voluntarily rendered to him by all his subjects. Thus the character of JEHOVAH will be seen in the glory of his residence; the dignity and virtue of those who surround his throne; the wisdom of their destination, officers, and employments; their reverence for his perfections; their devotion to his service; the rewards which they receive from his hand; and particularly in the characteristical nature of his government, by which all things will improve, refine, and brighten, for ever.

This knowledge of the righteous in heaven will be extensively acquired by contemplation. For this employment they will be most happily fitted by the superior vigour of their minds; by the vastness of the field opened to their view; by the delightful nature of the objects which it contains; and by the endless opportunities furnished for it in the progress of duration.

What they will acquire from this source, their mutual communications will mightily enlarge. The different generations of the righteous will unfold to each other those providential dispensations of God to his church of which *they* have severally been witnesses; their own difficulties and temptations; their faith and hope; their perseverance and triumph; together with all the manifestations of mercy which they received in the present world. *Into these things angels* also will *desire to look:* for they will discern, by means of *the church, the manifest wisdom of God.* From them will men, in their turn, learn with transport the dispensations of God in the heavenly world throughout all its past ages. In this manner will the eye behold the events of all preceding periods, brought together from every part of the universe, concentred in one luminous point, and formed into an image, intense, exact, and beautiful, beyond imagination.

Christ is the light of heaven, as well as of the present world. He has taught us, that he will feed his followers, and lead them to living fountains of waters. He will furnish them with that knowledge which is the true food of

the mind; and to slake their thirst for improvement will lead them to the fountains of eternal wisdom, from which they shall drink for ever. The perfections and pleasure of the uncreated mind he will eternally unfold; and direct them throughout all the ages of heaven in the paths of truth, virtue, and enjoyment. The instructor will be their Saviour. The disciples will be those whom he has redeemed from perdition with his own precious blood. Think what must be the instructions of such a Teacher, what the improvement of such disciples!

It ought to be added, that *in heaven, testimony will completely assume its proper character.* Safe from error and incapable of deceit, perfectly exact and completely adequate, it will command assent equally with demonstration. Distrust, the wall of partition between intelligent beings, will be finally broken down; and confidence, unmingled and unalloyed, will resume its place. What a history will this testimony unfold! It will be the history of virtuous minds; of angels; of the REDEEMER; of JEHOVAH; of *his* boundless wisdom and beneficence; of *their* virtue and salvation.

2. *Another employment of the righteous will be* TO GLORIFY GOD.

Under the preceding head it has been observed, that in the natural and moral creation, and in the system of providence, God will, in a sense, be all that will be known, and that the intelligence, virtue, and enjoyment, of the heavenly world will be an immense and endlessly varied display of divine perfection. It was also observed, that God will be seen as he is.

With these views of his character, *the heavenly inhabitants will render to him supreme and unmingled reverence.* He will appear in his proper character, infinitely great and majestic, but divested of all those terrors amid which he has so often manifested himself in the present world. He will no longer have *his way in the whirlwind and in the storm;* nor be surrounded by a flame of devouring fire. These were manifestations made to sinners, and will never be repeated in the heavenly world. That *fear of the Lord which is wisdom;* that *fear of the Lord which is a fountain of life;* will rise spontaneously and delightfully in every

mind, when it fixes its eye on the greatness and purity of JEHOVAH; at once infinitely awful and lovely: while the *fear* which *bringeth into bondage* will by *perfect love be cast out for ever.* This reverence is a delightful and exalted emotion; an ennobling exercise of piety; and the proper regard of a virtuous creature towards the majesty and purity of his Creator.

They will also render to God *supreme admiration.*

In all the works of creation and providence, it will be their everlasting employment to trace with a scrutinizing eye the manifestations of divine wisdom. This attribute they will find exhibited in the endless multitude of beings and events; their attributes and their operations: the fitness of each to its place and purpose; their perfection as parts of a mighty whole; the symmetry with which they are arranged; the skill with which they are directed; the greatness and glory of the end to which all are destined; and the perfection of the manner in which it is accomplished. The field of study is immense; the investigation will be eternal: and at every step, their admiration will rise higher and higher without end.

Another exercise of these happy beings towards their Creator will be *supreme love.*

Their *benevolence* towards God will be supreme, as being the sum of all existence, compared with which the creatures whom he has made are nothing. To his glory and the prosperity of his designs their good-will will occupy *all the heart, and all the soul, and all the strength, and all the understanding.* They will regard him with unlimited *complacency,* as the being in whom exists, and operates, and shines, whatever consummate virtue can approve and love. They will render to him intense and unmingled *gratitude,* as the source of boundless good to a boundless multitude of beings: good, felt by each in his own bosom with astonishment and rapture.

Equally entire will be *the confidence* exercised by the celestial inhabitants towards the Author of their blessings.

The truth of God will there be seen to be *as the great* [redacted] *his word for ever settled in heaven.* The [redacted] the faithfulness of its Maker as *the rock of*

ages, and on the mercy of its Redeemer as *the corner-stone laid in Zion; the sure foundation, tried and precious.* The object will be perfect, the confidence will be entire.

In a former discourse concerning *the nature of evangelical faith, or confidence,* I have remarked, that there seems not to be in the nature of things any *science,* properly so called, of the character of spirits, beside that which is possessed by the infinite mind. It is the prerogative of omniscience to look directly upon the hearts of spiritual beings, and to see the nature of their thoughts as they exist. Created minds learn the character of each other by experience. When they uniformly speak truth, they are believed to be characteristically sincere. When they uniformly exhibit faithfulness, they become characteristically objects of confidence. In the same manner they learn the character of the Creator.

The mysteries which in this world have perplexed their views concerning the dispensations and character of God, will there be finished by a complete disclosure of their nature, tendencies, and ends. It will there be clearly discerned, that in every case God proposed and accomplished that which was fittest to be done; that which in the possession of clear, unprejudiced, unerring views, their own minds pronounce to be worthy of the universal Ruler. This conviction will preclude every doubt, every fear, concerning his future dispensations. The perfection of the *past* will be admitted without a question, as complete evidence of the perfection of the *future.* The soul therefore will cheerfully yield itself with implicit confidence to the guidance and conduct of its Creator throughout the never-ending progress of duration.

To the strength and growth of this emotion (than which none is more delightful, more excellent, or more improving), the daily administration of the heavenly system of providence will mightily contribute. The emanations of forgiving, redeeming, and sanctifying love, and the smiles of infinite complacency, will, on the one hand, warm their hearts with a gratitude; and on the other, invigorate and enrapture a confidence, forbidden by no law, confined by no bounds, and capable of no excess.

From all these views and emotions in the minds of the heavenly inhabitants will flow their everlasting praise.

The praise of the mind, as every one will easily see who reads with attention the various songs contained in the Scriptures, is formed by the combination and exercise of the attributes which I have mentioned. Of this the praise of the lips is only the expression. To the Omniscient it is obvious no external worship can be necessary. The eye which looks into the mind with an intuitive view, sees in the union of just thoughts and virtuous affections, particularly in the combined efforts of piety to glorify its Author, an altar erected and an oblation made of the purest incense and the sweetest of all perfumes. This offering is however perceptible to no other being. The ends for which external religious services are enjoined, are to make powerful impressions on the mind of the worshipper; and to awaken powerful sympathy and increase devotion in many minds by participation. For these ends, it is presumed, it exists in every world where religious worship exists; and will unquestionably hold a distinguished place in heaven. There the Scriptures teach us, united praise will be offered up to God throughout the ages of eternity. This was the peculiar worship of Paradise. It is the peculiar worship of heaven.

With immediate reference to this religious employment, the followers of Christ are said to be made by him *priests unto God*. Every glorified spirit will there be a divinely commissioned minister of religion; whose proper business it will be to offer this pure and fragrant oblation for ever. The glorious character of God; a forgiving, redeeming, and sanctifying God: his wonderful works of creation, and the astonishing dispensations of his eternal providence, will intensely occupy and delightfully engross the minds of these happy beings. In the celebration of these, the first of all themes, with the souls, and voices, and harps, of the heavenly inhabitants unite with harmony and transport. *The four living ones, the four-and-twenty elders, the innumerable company of angels, and the great multitude which no man can number, of all nations, kindreds, and tongues,* will mutually kindle with devotion and ecstasy, while they

resound the everlasting song; *Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come! Amen. Blessing, and glory, and honour, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever!*

From the same views and affections will spring *the active service which the redeemed will render to God in the future world.*

Heaven is styled *the temple of God* (Rev. vii. 15), to denote the character of its inhabitants, as being all virtuous, and their employments as being all sacred. *In this temple,* it is said, *they serve God* religiously *day and night;* to denote, that, however they may be employed, their minds are in a perpetual state of devotion. Wherever they are, piety is their predominating character. Still the Scriptures plainly appear to teach us, that their employments are not merely those which are involved in the word *worship.*

The redeemed are made *kings* as well as priests *unto God; and will reign with him for ever and ever.*

In the sentence of approbation pronounced upon them immediately after death, it is declared, that *they shall be rulers over many things,* as well as that *they shall enter into the joy of their Lord.* They have *overcome,* and according to the promise of Christ, *will sit with him in his throne, even as he overcame, and is set down with his Father in his throne.* Whatever difference of opinion may exist concerning the exact meaning of these declarations, there will, I presume, be no doubt concerning their general import. That they indicate high dignity of character, station, and employment, will not, I think, admit of a dispute.

In the universe, the immense kingdom of JEHOVAH, order, in the perfect sense, extends from the infinite Ruler through all the gradations of virtuous beings, down to the humblest of its inhabitants. In such an empire, the services necessary to this order, and the accomplishment of the purposes for which it is established, are of necessity endless in their multitude, and sufficiently comprehensive to furnish his own part to every virtuous being. For this part each individual was formed and destined; and both his faculties and attainments were directed by the divine pre-

science so as to qualify him to act in it in a better manner than any other being. Thus no individual will be useless, forgotten, or unemployed. Every one will labour in his own place, and will perform the duties of that place in the happiest manner.

The system fills immensity, and endures through eternity. The plans, persons, faculties, attributes, and employments, are fitted by supreme wisdom to the extent of the system. Ample room therefore is here furnished for the operations of every virtuous being; a boundless scope for every endowment, acquisition, and effort.

In this vast kingdom, the redeemed will fill the honourable stations indicated by the passages quoted above, and by the character delineated in the preceding discourse; and will be designated to employments of superlative honour and glory. *They are sons, and kings, and priests, to God the Father. They are brethren of Christ, and joint-heirs with him to the heavenly inheritance.* Angels are their *fellow-servants, and of their brethren.* They will therefore be united with angels in the magnificent employments, which I have attributed to them in the second discourse concerning these illustrious beings.

Of the happy agents who are thus employed, it is to be observed, that many who are now last and humblest in the mediatorial kingdom, will then be exalted to stations of peculiar distinction; as those *angels who kept not their first estate* will become the last and lowest of all intelligent creatures. The meek and humble virtues will then rise to their own proper estimation; and, while they shine with their inherent lustre and beauty, will be seen and acknowledged, as copies pre-eminently lovely of the meek and lowly Redeemer.

In the exercise of these offices there will be no emulation, jealousy, nor hatred. The system will be planned by God himself; and acknowledged with reverence and delight as his perfect work. In it wisdom will be displayed, and goodness operate without limits. The single employment will be to do good and glorify its Author.

3. *Another employment of the redeemed will be, to befriend each other.*

Heaven is the world of friendship; of friendship un-

mingled, ardent, and entire. The disinterested love of the gospel dwells here in every bosom. Selfishness, since the ejection of the fallen angels from these delightful regions, has been here unknown and unheard of, except in the melancholy tidings which have reached the happy inhabitants of its deplorable effects on our apostate world. Here every individual, in the strictest sense, fulfils the second great command of the moral law; and literally loves his neighbour as himself. No private, separate interest is even proposed. A common good is announced by the voice of God; so great as to comprise all individual happiness; so arranged as to furnish every one his proper portion, the part which he is to fulfil, and the means by which he is to act in it with absolute efficacy; and so noble, as to fix every eye, engross every heart, and summon every effort. It is a good, involving not only all that can be acquired, but all that can be wished, all that can exist. This great truth is also admitted with perfect confidence by every celestial mind. Every individual completely realizes the import and the truth of that glorious declaration of Christ, the foundation of all pure and lasting good, whether personal or social; *It is more blessed to give than to receive.* Under its influence, all the hearts and hands, all the mighty faculties and unwearied efforts, of the heavenly inhabitants are completely occupied in doing good. To what a mass must this good arise, where the work is carried on by saints and angels in the great field of heaven, throughout the endless ages of duration!

As there are here no separate interests and no selfish affections, there can of course be no jealousy, hatred, nor contention. Every individual will feel, that his own place and portion are contrived by the wisdom which cannot err, and the love which cannot injure; that they are necessary and desirable parts of a perfect system of good; that no other being could so well fill the station which he occupies, and that *he* could not so well fill any other station. In a word, he will see, that had the whole arrangement of providence been left to his own choice, he should have chosen exactly what God has chosen for him. All his wishes therefore, all his views, will be satisfied.

Thus, wherever the mind roves through the immense re-

gions of heaven, it will find, among all its innumerable millions, not an enemy, not a stranger, not an indifferent heart, not a reserved bosom. Disguise here, and even concealment, will be unknown. The soul will have no interests to conceal, no thoughts to disguise. A window will be opened in every breast; and shew to every passing eye the rich and beautiful furniture within.

In this world of depravity, where the man who knew it better than any other, speaking with the voice of inspiration, could say, and say with obvious propriety, *A faithful man who can find?* a few friends, nay, even one, is regarded as an invaluable treasure. In that world all will be friends; and the soul will, like the happy regions in which it dwells, contain ample room for the admission of all.

At the same time this friendship will endure for ever. No degeneracy will awaken alarm and distrust; no alienation chill the heart; nor treachery pierce the soul with anguish. No parent will mourn over an apostate child; and no child over a profligate parent. No brothers nor sisters will be wrung with agony by the defection and corruption of those who, inexpressibly endeared to them in this world by the tender ties of nature, and the superior attachments of the gospel, have here walked with them side by side in the path of life, and have at length become their happy companions in the world of glory. Husbands and wives also, here mutually and singularly beloved, will there be united, not indeed in their former earthly relation, but in a friendship far more delightful; and wafted onward by the stream of ages without a sigh, without a fear, will become in each other's eyes more and more excellent, amiable, and endeared, for ever. That the redeemed, who have been known to each other in the present world, will be mutually known in heaven, I have shewn in a former discourse. That this knowledge will prove the means of mutual happiness cannot be doubted. At the same time it is to be remembered, that their characters universally excellent, their stations universally honourable, and their employments universally useful, will be endlessly diversified; so as to present to every eye worth, beauty, and glory, in forms always peculiar, and with loveliness always new.

Of the several ingredients which constitute this happi-

ness of the redeemed, and which have been mentioned in these discourses, it is to be universally observed, that *they will be continually progressive towards higher and higher perfection.* Concerning him whose name is called *Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the Father of the everlasting age, and the Prince of peace,* it is declared, that *of the increase of his government, and of his peace, there shall be no end.* The word *government* here denotes the administration itself, and the displays which it involves of the greatness, wisdom, and goodness, of the Ruler. *Peace* often denotes in the Scriptures prosperity; and here intends the whole happiness of his subjects. Their residence, their bodies, their minds, their knowledge, their virtue, their stations, their employments, and their enjoyments, will form a system of glory, and of good, refining, brightening, and ascending, for ever. Their possessions will be rapturous, their prospects will be ecstatic.

To the eye of man, the sun appears a pure light; a mass of unmingled glory. Were we to ascend with a continual flight towards this luminary, and could, like the eagle, gaze directly on its lustre; we should in our progress behold its greatness continually enlarge, and its splendour become every moment more intense. As we rose through the heavens, we should see a little orb changing gradually into a great world; and as we advanced nearer and nearer, should behold it expanding every way, until all that was before us became a universe of excessive and immeasurable glory. Thus the heavenly inhabitant will, at the commencement of his happy existence, see the divine system filled with magnificence and splendour, and arrayed in glory and beauty; and, as he advances onward through the successive periods of duration, will behold all things more and more luminous, transporting, and sun-like, for ever.

SERMON CLXXII.

CONCLUSION.

GENERAL REMARKS.

Hear! for I will speak of excellent things; and the opening of my lips shall be right things.—PROV. VIII. 6.

IN a long series of discourses I have now gone through a system of theology. I have considered the *existence, character, decrees,* and *works,* of *God; the creation,* and *primitive state of man; his apostacy,* and *condemnation;* the *state* of *human depravity,* and the *impossibility of justification by our own righteousness.* I have inquired at length into the *character of Christ;* the *offices which he sustains as Mediator;* the *justification which we obtain by his righteousness,* and *the faith by means of which we are justified;* the *character of the Holy Spirit; his agency in our regeneration,* the *nature* and *necessity of that work;* its *antecedents, attendants, consequences,* and *evidences: the law of God, the principal precepts into which it is distributed,* and *the principal duties which they require;* the *nature of our inability to obey the law,* and *the manner of our restoration to obedience.* I have also discussed *the means of grace;* and exhibited a view of *the church,* its *officers,* and *duties.* Finally, I have examined *the nature of death,* and *its consequences;* particularly the *resurrection,* the *judgment,* and *the retributions, of the righteous* and *the wicked.*

Thus have I brought my original design to a termination. As a natural and proper close of the whole, I propose to make some general remarks on this great subject in the following discourse.

In the text, mankind are commanded to listen to the things spoken by the wisdom of God, because *they are right and excellent things.* So far as the present purpose is concerned, it is of no consequence whether we suppose these things to be spoken by the *wisdom of God,* literally understood; or by CHRIST, elsewhere called the *Wisdom of God,*

and generally, and in my view justly, considered as speaking throughout this chapter. The things here referred to are the things contained in the Scriptures. All these were spoken by the Wisdom of God. All also were spoken by the Spirit of Christ, who inspired alike the writers of the Old and New Testament. Hence the Old Testament is called the word, and the New, the gospel of Christ. (See Col. iii. 16; and 2 Cor. iv. 4.)

These things are in the text said to be *right and excellent*. An attempt has been made in the progress of these discourses, to exhibit the most important of these things in a regular scheme to the view of this audience. It has been my design to exhibit them as they are actually contained in the Scriptures; and to let the sacred volume speak its own language. This design I have watchfully pursued; and I hope faithfully. There was a period in my life, at which I regarded human systems of theology with more reverence than I can now justify; and much more than I am willing should be rendered to my own. *Let God be true, but every man,* who wilfully contradicts his declarations, *a liar.*

In studying the Scriptures, to which, as a theological employment, those who hear me know I have for a long time been in a great degree necessarily confined by the peculiar state of my eyes, I have found no small difficulty in permitting them to speak for themselves. I have found texts in them, in various instances thwarting opinions, which I had entertained with little or no suspicion, that they could be erroneous. Such opinions, by an authority which I durst not oppose, I have been compelled to give up. Whether I have adopted better in their place is yet to be determined. One consideration furnishes me with a satisfactory hope, that what I have taught is, substantially at least, the truth of God. It is this: the system contained in these discourses, is in substance the same with that which is found in almost every Protestant creed and confession of faith; and with the scheme adopted in every age by that part of the Christian church which has gained every where the appropriate name of orthodox. There is another consideration from which I derive a similar hope. It is the system, under the preaching of which almost exclusively the religion of the heart, whose genuineness is proved by its evan-

gelical fruits, has revived, prevailed, and prospered. I will therefore, for the present occasion only, assume it as granted, that it is in substance the system of the Scriptures; and is therefore formed of the *right and excellent things* mentioned in the text. Regarded in this manner, it furnishes a just foundation for the following

REMARKS.

1. *How superior is the system of divine truth, contained in the Scriptures, as exhibited in this manner, to the moral schemes of philosophy.*

The ancient philosophers, with scarcely an exception, and in my view without one, were Polytheists, Sceptics, or Atheists. When they speak of *God in the singular number,* they either intend *the gods universally,* or *the chief of them;* not the one living and true God made known in the Scriptures, and now acknowledged without a question by the Christian world. The miserable consequences of both Atheism and Polytheism have heretofore been summarily stated in these discourses; and have been so amply presented to us by the page of history, as to satisfy the doubts of all incredulity which does not proceed from choice. These gods of philosophy were all finite beings, universally limited in their attributes and operations. All of them also were deeply tinctured with the folly and vice of men. Not a virtuous being was found among them: not one of a connexion with whom a Christian, nay, even a sober man, would not have been ashamed. At the same time they were engaged in continued hostilities against each other. They were indeed immortal; but were universally born as men are; were governed by the same selfish views; pursued similar employments; and derived their happiness from similar sources. The gods of Epicurus found their enjoyment in quiet, apathy, nectar, and ambrosia.

Some of these philosophers, when they spoke of God in the singular number, taught, that *his substance was fire;* some, that he was a compound of the four elements, *fire, air, earth, and water;* some, that *the sun was God;* others, that God was *the soul of the world,* animating it as the human soul the human body; some that the το παν, or the universe, was God, and that all things are only parts or branches of

this universal being: every thing which we see being supposed by them to partake alike of the divine nature, and to be literally a part of God. This, as you know, was afterward the doctrine of *Spinosa*. *Zeno* declared ether to be God; and *Chrysippus*, heaven. *Marcus Antoninus* addresses a prayer to *the world*. *Seneca* declares *men to be fellows, or companions, and members, of God*. *Epictetus* also advises persons, when they are feeding, or exercising, to consider that *it is a god whom they feed*, and *whom they exercise*. Many sects of them also held, that there were *two principal gods; the one good, the other evil*.

Concerning the *origin of the world* they seem universally to have held the doctrine, that *matter was the eternal*. Some of them supposed, that the beings in it were *made by a divine power*, which they denoted by the name Δημιουργος. Epicurus and his followers taught, that *all things owed their present state of existence to the casual aggregation of atoms*. Others supposed them *to have existed in an eternal series*. Others still attributed their existence to *destiny*, *fate*, or *necessity*. None of them, so far as I have observed, considered the universe as created by the power of God.

Of providence their apprehensions were equally various and imperfect. Some of them, as the Epicureans and others, absolutely denied, that God governed the world at all. Others supposed, that an imperfect and limited providence, parted into shares among all the gods, was exercised within their respective limits by them all; but more extensively by the being whom they considered as supreme, than by the rest. In this superintendance of earthly objects they were considered as often opposing each other, and as engaged at times in mutual abuse and violent contentions. The providence actually exerted, some philosophers supposed to be confined to heaven, and in no respect concerned with the affairs of men. Those who believed providence to be extended to this world, with very few exceptions, considered it as employed about its great and general concerns only; and denied wholly its interference with those of individuals. Some of them indeed imagined, that the gods were sometimes curious about individuals; and suspected that they might, in some instances, superintend the great affairs of great and distinguished men. But almost all of

them appear to have supposed, that the allotments of mankind are parcelled out, and that the good and evil which they experience, are determined by *fortune, necessity, chance,* or *fate.*

Moral good almost every one of them considered *as produced by every man for himself;* and not at all by the gods. Cicero, speaking in the person of Cotta, says, "The gifts of fortune are to be asked of God; but a man is to expect wisdom only from himself:" and this he declares to be the judgment of all mankind. "Who," he asks, "ever gave thanks to the gods for being a good man?" Accordingly, many of the ancient philosophers considered the wise man as being independent of the gods; and, in some respects, even as their superior.

Their views concerning *the origin of evil* were idle and indefensible. Some of them supposed it to be derived from *pollution acquired in a pre-existing state;* a scheme demanding the same explanation as its existence in the present state. Others attributed it to *the connexion of the soul with the body:* supposing matter to be the seat of moral turpitude. Others ascribed it to *the evil deity;* who, as they imagined, had sufficient power to bring it into existence, in spite of the good one.

Equally delusive and unfounded were their apprehensions concerning *the manner of expiating sin, and cleansing the soul from its pollution.* Socrates, with a vigour of investigation unprecedented, and unrivalled in the annals of philosophy, advanced so far as *to doubt whether it were possible for God to forgive sin.* Generally they taught, that the safest way was, for all men to adopt the religious system of their ancestors, and to rely on the established modes of expiation. These were *sacrifices, oblations, prayers, penance, processions, pilgrimages,* and *ablutions.* Their ideas of reformation seem rarely to have extended so far, and never farther, than common sobriety and decency of manners. Virtue, in the proper and evangelical sense, they plainly did not understand. Some of them, as I have heretofore observed, declared ambition, or the love of glory, to be virtue; some, the external observance of their religious ritual. Some placed it in imbibing one, and some in adopting another scheme of philosophy, or what they were pleased

to call wisdom. Some supposed it to consist in courage. Others believed it to be that *amor patriæ*, which prompted the inhabitants of one country to carry fire and sword, death and desolation, into another.

Their views concerning the *worship of God* were wonderfully gross. Almost universally they supported the existing worship. This, as you know, was composed of a multitude of unmeaning superstitions, of human sacrifices, making voluntary incisions in the flesh of the worshippers, the ravings of a temporary frenzy, and the practice of unlimited pollution.

The morals of these men were even more unsound than their religion. A great part of them permitted fraud, falsehood, war undertaken for conquest or glory, profaneness, anger, revenge, filial impiety, parental unkindness, unlimited lewdness, unlimited pride, ambition, and suicide. Of all these doctrines taken together, it is to be observed, that they never made a single good man; nor would they, if they were now to be embraced with the whole heart, and to control absolutely the whole life, constitute the subject of them a virtuous or praiseworthy being.

Concerning a *future state* their conceptions were deplorably lame. A multitude of them denied such a state. The Stoics and Epicureans, who encountered Paul at Athens, mocked him; and styled him *a babbler*, because he preached to them Jesus, and the αναστασις, or future state. Of those who did not deny it, some doubted; others conjectured; and others still faintly and waveringly believed it. The views which they formed concerning it, particularly concerning its enjoyments, were very gross. Generally, the rewards which they assigned to the virtuous, were the gratifications usually coveted in the present life, stripped of the inconveniences which attend them here. Pleasant fields and fine weather, songs and garlands, nectar and ambrosia, were the entertainments of their *elysium*. As they knew not what virtue was, it is not wonderful that they could not devise proper enjoyments for the virtuous.

How immense is the distance between these things and the system of religious truth which you have here been taught from the Scriptures. Here, as the foundation on

which the system is erected, you find exhibited the *self-existent, eternal, immutable, almighty, omniscient,* and *omnipresent,* JEHOVAH; infinitely wise, just, good, merciful, faithful, and true; the Creator, Preserver, Benefactor, and Ruler, of the universe; by whose command all things came into existence; by whose hand all are preserved, governed, and blessed; to whom all intelligent creatures are accountable; and by whom all will be judged according to their works. The law by which this glorious Being rules the creatures whom he has made, you have seen to be perfect; divinely excellent in its nature, and infinitely desirable in its design. You have seen man originally possessed of spotless purity, apostatizing from his Maker in the very same manner in which *we* daily apostatize; coveting natural good, which he could not lawfully possess: and forgetful for a time of his duty to God, yielding himself up to the wish for the prohibited enjoyment. Condemned for this transgression by the sentence of the law which he had broken, it became impossible for him to be justified by his own works, or to be restored to the favour of *him who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity.* In this situation you have seen *the Son of God descend from heaven; become a substitute for man; expiate his sins on the cross; and, re-ascending to heaven, intercede for his deliverance.* The way for his justification is thus completely opened. But man, too obstinate a sinner to embrace even these means of life, would be ruined if he were left here. Accordingly you have seen THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH enter this world on the professed design of *renewing the soul,* and infusing into it a disposition to return to God and its duty. The change you have seen to be essential; the very change which he needed to experience; an actual renovation; a resumption of the character which he had lost. By the same divine guardian *he is conducted* also *through the manifold dangers and difficulties which in this world continually arrest even Christians themselves:* and under this conduct he is enabled, notwithstanding all his ignorance and folly, temptations and enemies, to persist in the progress which he has happily begun, and finally to obtain the promised reward.

You have heard *the law of God* explained throughout all its most important precepts; and have seen it require every

human duty, and forbid every human transgression, in thought, word, and action. You have seen the heart exhibited as the seat of both sin and holiness. *The nature of that holiness* the virtue of the Scriptures, the moral character on which the omniscient eye looks with complacency, has been presented to you as consisting *in supreme love to God, and universal good-will to mankind;* as the energy of the soul, employed wholly in glorifying God, and doing good. The *nature of sin,* its opposite, has been explained to you as consisting in *a disposition to pursue, supremely and exclusively, a private, separate interest,* opposed to God, and hostile to his intelligent creation.

The *inability of man* to obey this law, the subject of such extensive altercation, has been exhibited to you as consisting merely *in the disposition or inclination of the mind;* and *the means of renewing our ability to obey,* have been shewn to be, *repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ;* the rational, the indispensable, the only possible means of this restoration. The means also *of obtaining these attributes,* commonly called the means of grace, have, it is believed, been set before you in such a light, together with *the character and duties of those by whom they are to be used, and of those by whom they are to be administered,* as to shew their reality, divine appointment, and indispensable subserviency to the great design of salvation.

Finally, you have been taught *the nature of death,* as an important part of the great providential system; *its immediate consequences* in the intermediate state of the soul; *the resurrection; the judgment; the miserable end of the wicked, and the glory of the righteous beyond the grave.*

The schemes of *infidel philosophy* concerning these great subjects I have elsewhere exhibited; and have not time to repeat them here. It will be sufficient for the present occasion to observe, that they have added nothing which is material to what was taught by the ancient philosophers, beside what they have borrowed from the Scriptures. They have not indeed in many instances been polytheists; and the Bible has compelled them to speak more decently concerning the Creator; though, I think, with less appear-

ance of reverence, than many of their predecessors. But their religion and morals, so far as they have proceeded from their own minds, have not been a whit more rational, more pure, or less deserving of severe animadversion, although perhaps somewhat more speciously taught, than those of the ancients.

Compare now the systems which I have summarily spread before you. How obvious, how universal, how incomprehensible, is the difference between them! They set out with JEHOVAH at the head of one; and Jupiter, accompanied by the herd of the Heathen gods and goddesses, at the head of the other. The distance between these two objects of contemplation is kept up, so far as the nature of the several subjects is susceptible of it, throughout every succeeding part of the respective schemes. The character, the works, the law, the government, the worship, are in the one case those of Jehovah; the Builder of the universe; the infinite Ruler; the Judge of the quick and the dead; and the final Rewarder of the righteous and the wicked. In the other, they are those of Jupiter; the son of Saturn; the brother of Neptune and Pluto; and the husband of Juno, his sister; born in the island of Crete; dethroning his father; sharing his empire with his brothers; the father of a numerous race of gods and men; controlled by fate; sustaining his own life by eating, drinking, and sleep; passionate, petulant, revengeful, disappointed, not unfrequently, of his wishes and designs; lewd, gratified by the number, variety, and smell, of his sacrifices: his character dependant and fluctuating: his government a succession of expedients snd fetches. Trace both these schemes from the beginning to the end; and you will find these representations fair portraits of them both. *The distinction between them, which is formed by the different views which they contain of the character of God, runs through every part of the two systems;* and cannot but be marked by a considerate eye in all the several branches. The scheme of providence; the views of virtue and vice; the means of restoration to the divine favour, of justification and acceptance; the precepts of piety and morality; the worship, the final judgment, and the future state, are all suited in the one

case to JEHOVAH; and in the other to Jupiter, united with the group of gods and goddesses.

II. *We are here furnished with powerful evidence, that the Scriptures are a revelation from God.*

These different systems actually exist. One of them is actually found in the Scriptures. The others are all professedly, as well as really, schemes of human philosophy. For this difference between them there is a cause. What is that cause?

It is not superiority of native talents. This infidels themselves will acknowledge. There is not, so far as I know, any reason to conclude, that any group of human beings have possessed greater native talents than can be found among the learned Greeks and Romans. Besides, we find the same system in substance exhibited by *all the writers of the Old and New Testament.* It certainly will not be pretended, that all these were superior to Homer and Aristotle, Cicero and Virgil, in original vigour of mind.

It cannot be superiority of education.

The arts and sciences of the Greeks and Romans were certainly far more advanced than those of the Jews. On moral subjects only do they write like children, and teach doctrines which little children in this country, who are able to write at all, would be ashamed either to teach or believe. On all other subjects they write like men, and like men of capacious and superior minds. Even on moral subjects they write in one sense like men. The childish character they discover in *embracing* these errors, while in *defending* them they manifest the utmost strength and ingenuity of the human intellect.

At the same time, David, Amos, Christ, Matthew, Mark, John, James, Peter, and Jude, were all uneducated peasants, unpossessed of a single advantage of education, which is not enjoyed by the plainest, humblest people of this state, and destitute of some which they enjoy.

It is not the advantage of prior instruction, derived from men of superior minds, whose wisdom and sublime discoveries they imbibed and retailed to succeeding generations.

I admit that the Greeks were, to a considerable extent, obliged to form their own philosophy on these subjects. But Moses and Job (whom I consider as the author of the

book which bears his name), are the two earliest writers whose works are now extant; and these men enter directly upon the subjects in question, with the same clearness and precision, with the same purity and sublimity, which are found in those who followed them. The same JEHOVAH reigns in their works, the same scheme of creation and providence, the same system of morals and religion, which prevail every where throughout the Scriptures.

Should it be said, that Moses was educated in all the learning of the Egyptians, it is readily acknowledged. But it must be acknowledged also, that the Egyptians had no such doctrines as these. The laws and government of the Egyptians appear to have been wise and deserving of respect, while their religious philosophy was puerile and contemptible.

Should it be said, that the Persian and Hindoo writings are in some instances prior in time to those of Job and Moses, I answer, that this is said gratuitously, without the least support from evidence. But should it be granted, it will not at all affect the point in debate. The Brahminical and Persian systems are even more absurd and childish than those of the Egyptians and Grecks. All of them contain some just and sublime doctrines; but they are blended with such a mass of despicable rubbish, as to prove on the one hand the immeasurable superiority of the scriptural system to them all; and, on the other, that those who have delivered the superior parts of them to us, were not the discoverers of these just and sublime doctrines; but received them, traditionarily, from revelations communicated to men of preceding ages.

It is here to be observed, that *these philosophers*, of every country and of every age, *differed endlessly from each other* concerning those parts of their respective systems which were of primary importance, as well as concerning others. The two most important of all subjects of contemplation are, GOD and the *supreme good. Concerning the former of these*, Varro, who probably knew better than any other ancient, declares, that *there were three hundred different opinions.* In other words, *there were three hundred different gods of the philosophy with which he was acquainted. Concerning the latter, the diversities of opinions,*

among the same men, *were*, as he asserts, *two hundred and eighty-eight*. If they differed in this manner concerning these all-important objects, it will be easily believed, that in forming a system, into every part of which these must enter as constituent materials, they must differ in a similar manner. Accordingly they differ, contend, and contradict each other, with respect to almost every thing which has been called philosophy. Nor is this discordance found in different sects of philosophers only; but in different members also of the same sect, and in different discourses of the same writer.

How opposite to all this is the appearance of the Scriptures! They were written during the whole progress of fifteen centuries, with no considerable interval, except that between Malachi and Matthew; and were therefore liable to all the diversities of opinion which could be supposed to arise during this long period, in a single nation, from any source whatever. There were at least one hundred writers and speakers concerned in them, as teachers of divine truth. They were of all classes of society, from the prince to the peasant. The modes in which they wrote, may be considered as involving all those in which men have thought it desirable to write, except such as are professedly fictitious. The states of society, and the spheres of life in which the writers lived, and the occasions which called forth their several compositions, were at least equally numerous and diverse. Still an entire harmony runs through them all. Amos the herdsman, Matthew the toll-gatherer, and John the fisherman, exhibit the same just, clear, extensive, pure, and exalted views of divine subjects, the same religion, the same morality, and the same scheme of salvation with those of Moses and Paul, notwithstanding all their learning, and those of Daniel and Isaiah, David and Solomon, notwithstanding the high rank which they held in human society.

It is farther to be observed, that *the scriptural writers have taught all which mankind at present know concerning morals and religion*. There is no rule of faith, and no rule of practice known by men at the present time, and fairly defensible, which is not, either expressly declared or unquestionably implied in the Scriptures.

It cannot here be said, that *these defects of philosophy arose from the want of sufficient numbers engaged in the pursuit of this great object, or of sufficient zeal, industry, and exertion, on the part of those who were engaged.* The number of men embarked in this pursuit was prodigious. Success in it was a source of distinction coveted by kings and emperors. The zeal with which it was prosecuted was accordingly intense; and the labours employed in it extended through a long succession of ages.

For this mighty difference between the schemes of philosophy and the system of the Scriptures, no infidel has hitherto accounted; and no rational account, it is presumed, can be given, not involving a cause, which, if adequate to the effect, will be more difficult of admission, more miraculous than inspiration.

SERMON CLXXIII.

CONCLUSION.

GENERAL REMARKS.

Hear! for I will speak of excellent things; and the opening of my lips shall be right things.—PROV. VIII. 6.

IN the preceding part of this discourse, after recapitulating the great subjects adopted as parts of a theological system in the series of sermons then brought to a close, and making a few observations on the import of the text, I proceeded to make some general remarks on the subject at large.

In the first, *I considered the superiority of the moral scheme of the Scriptures, which I had so long been employed in unfolding to this audience, to the moral schemes of philosophy.*

In the second, *I mentioned that this view of theology furnished powerful evidence of the revelation of the Scriptures.*

I shall now proceed to finish the discourse with two other remarks which I had not then sufficient time to consider; and observe,

III. *How well does the theology of the Scriptures merit the diligent investigation of every man furnished with an enlightened education.*

In periods not long past, a great proportion of those who were liberally educated in this country, regarded extensive attainments in theology as being of the highest importance to the completion of their literary character. Nor is the date very distant, when the same views prevailed among the Protestant nations on the eastern side of the Atlantic.

Many laymen may be mentioned whose theological acquisitions would have highly adorned the desk; and might justly have been coveted by clergymen of distinguished reputation. It is hoped that the spirit which gave birth to these attainments is reviving.

But it must be confessed, that for a considerable period the disposition to become versed in theology has declined, and for a period of indefinite length has been too low not to excite a serious regret in the mind of a wise and good man. Clergymen are often censured, and it is to be feared in too many instances justly, for their want of sufficient knowledge in this science. Almost all laymen, even those of enlightened minds and extensive acquisitions, are lamentably defective in their acquaintance with theology. Perhaps I should not wander far from the truth, were I to observe, that among the judicious farmers of this country, particularly among those most addicted to reading, there is a more extensive and a more accurate knowledge of the doctrines and precepts of Christianity, than among most men who have enjoyed the advantages of a superior education.

Many causes have undoubtedly operated to the production of the ignorance of which I complain. Among these I shall at the present time specify the three following.

1. *The want of that customary application to theological science among learned men, which would of course recommend it to those who followed them.*

The neglect which has been specified above, and which has grown out of many co-operating causes, has itself become a powerful cause of generating similar negligence. Every rising generation is, to a great extent, controlled by that which went before. Peculiarly is it true, that customary opinions and practices possess this control. Whatever is generally adopted, especially by enlightened men, is naturally supposed by such as are young to be founded in wisdom and truth; and is therefore customarily followed with little examination. The youths of the present generation, seeing their superiors in age and understanding negligent of theological science, easily believe, that it merits little attention from themselves. The subject they do not

examine; but are satisfied with merely following this example. Persons destined to the ministry, are supposed to addict themselves to this science, because it is indispensable to their future profession, and to the reputation, and even the subsistence, which it is expected to furnish. The example of these persons has therefore no influence on others. Clergymen also are supposed to commend their own science either from necessity or decency; and however able judges are regarded as being interested, and therefore partial. Hence their recommendations have comparatively little weight. Were liberally educated laymen, generally, to make extensive attainments in theology an important part of their acquisitions, there can be no reason to doubt, that those who succeeded them would addict themselves to this science with a good degree of zeal and industry. The truth of this opinion has been amply supported by experience. In the former times, to which I have alluded, the customary application of men in all the liberal professions adopted in enlightened countries to divine knowledge, forced the same application on such as followed them, and that through a long period. Nor could even the progress of licentiousness exterminate the custom, except by insensible degrees.

2. *The same evil has been extended and prolonged not a little by the ridicule so assiduously thrown upon this subject by infidels.*

These men have long arrayed themselves against Christianity. Their warfare they have carried on in every manner which has promised them the least success; and with a spirit worthy of the best cause. Arguments, learning, and facts, they resorted to until they became hopeless. When these failed, they had recourse to ridicule, sneers, and other expressions of contempt; clearly discerning, that on young minds especially these weapons would prevail where more honourable modes of attack would be powerless. "Ridicule," says Voltaire, a perfectly competent judge of this subject, "will do every thing; it is the strongest of all weapons. A bon mot is as good a thing as a good book." Whatever is ridiculed, young minds are prone to think ridiculous; and nothing has been so much

ridiculed as Christianity. Its Author was styled by the infidels to whom he preached, *a gluttonous man, and a wine-bibber; a friend of publicans and sinners;* and the system of doctrines and precepts which he taught has in modern times been loaded with epithets equally destitute of justice and decency. In truth, there is no employment more absolutely without any foundation in good sense; none more sottish, none more contemptible, than that of ridiculing Christianity. Still it has had, and will hereafter have, its wretched influence on giddy, puerile minds. The sting will be felt, dreaded, and shunned; and the least effect which it can be supposed to have on such minds will be, to discourage them from studying the doctrines, and embracing the precepts of the Scriptures.

3. *The introduction of ignorant and separatical preachers into the desk, has had extensively the same unhappy influence.*

Among all absurdities there is none perhaps more preposterous, than that presented to us when we see ignorance and vulgarity, enthusiasm and vociferation, seated in that desk, which ought to be exclusively appropriated to dignity and learning, wisdom and piety. Law, it is true, has its pettifoggers; and medicine its empirics; and both are means of deeply degrading the professions in which they appear. But these men are never employed in unfolding the truth of God, nor in pointing out the path to heaven. The sense of their unfitness for the business in which they act, though strong, is less deeply felt; their appearance, less public and regular; and the association of them in the mind with the sciences into which they intrude, less uniform, alloying, and offensive. The *knowledge* which *ignorance* is publicly employed to teach, will of course be believed to be narrow indeed. The employment in which vulgarity is summoned to preside, will be regarded as possessing a strong tincture of debasement. The application of these remarks to the case in hand is sufficiently melancholy, and the more so, because the situation of this country at least holds out no immediate or adequate remedy. So long as men will rather hear bad preachers than support good ones; so long as they choose to drag out the hours of public worship in hearing folly instead of learning wis-

dom; so long as deplorable avarice induces them to resign the desk into the hands of ignorance and impudence; the evil will exist and must be borne.

The appearance of such men in the character of teachers of religion insensibly, but almost irresistibly, entails upon theology itself a character derived of course from the men themselves. They are ignorant, vulgar, uncouth in their demeanour, coarse in their elocution, clumsy in their language, and full of mistakes in their opinions; halt lamentably in their constructions of Scripture; dissuade rather than convince by their arguments; and are yet vain, arrogant, censorious, magisterial in their decisions, and grossly calumnious towards those from whose opinions they differ. With all these characteristics they still appear as teachers of religion; a religion of which, in the speculative sense, they know almost nothing, and in the practical sense, there is too much reason to fear, still less. In this character the mind is prone, in spite of itself, to associate them, not only with other and better teachers, but also with the religion which they profess to teach. In such a case it is not easy to avoid uniting with this subject, in a greater or less degree, these wretched characteristics of those with whom we see it united; or to avoid regarding it with some degree of that contempt and loathing with which it is impossible to fail of regarding these men.

It is highly honourable to the memory of those men by whom New England was planted that they brought with them a body of ministers, distinguished not only for their piety, but also for their learning and wisdom; and that, immediately after their establishment in this country, they founded a college expressly for the purpose of perpetuating among their descendants a ministry possessed of these attributes. It is to the honour of their descendants, that they founded other seminaries, as from time to time they were necessary, for the same purpose; and that they have regularly and strenuously demanded these attributes in those who were candidates for the desk. No class of men has in any age, since the colonization of this country, possessed more learning than the clergy of its own churches. The episcopal church has also regularly demanded the

same education in those whom it has destined to the pulpit. I wish the same observation were equally true of other churches.

When therefore you look at these unauthorized intruders, and feel the regret and the disgust which perhaps you cannot avoid; turn your eyes to men of a superior character in the same office; not a small number of whom would be ornaments of any profession, and are actually ornaments of human nature. Let their wisdom and worth become an overbalance for the infirmities of these; and prove the means of effectuating in your minds a just reverence for the religion of the gospel. Look also beyond the Atlantic, and remember, that Usher, Leighton, Butler, Berkeley, Jeremy Taylor, Jewel, Tillotson, Sherlock, Owen, Doddridge, Watts, and a long train of others both in ancient and modern times; men who stand in the first rank of human intelligence; spent their lives in the study of theology; and that it was the glory of Bacon, Boyle, and Newton, of Grotius, Locke, Addison, Jones, and Johnson, to be enrolled among the friends and supporters of the Christian religion.

The true reasons for which we should addict ourselves to the pursuit of any science, are, *the pleasures which it may yield, and the profit to which it may conduct us.* With respect to theology, both these reasons lend their whole force to encourage our most diligent and persevering researches.

1. *The science of theology is capable of yielding more pleasure to the mind than any other.*

The pleasures which science is capable of yielding to the mind, *are addressed both to the imagination and the understanding.* Of both these kinds of pleasure, theology is eminently productive.

The pleasures conveyed to the mind through the imagination, are derived from such objects as are new, various, beautiful, refined, great, and noble; and, the more these attributes prevail, the more capable are the objects in which they are found of yielding this species of pleasure. But in no field of human pursuit are objects found in such numbers, and of such uniformity, which are invested with these attributes, or possess the power of yielding this pleasure,

in the same degree. In vain will you search for objects equally beautiful with multitudes which are presented to you in the Scriptures; with paradise and its inhabitants; with the innumerable and most delightful variegations of excellence which adorn the angelic character; with the endlessly diversified manifestations of kindness, compassion, and good providence, of God towards his children; the grateful and unaffected effusions of their piety to him; the delightful scenery, if I may so style it, of the millennial world, drawn with such unrivalled elegance by several of the prophets, and particularly by the pencil of *Isaiah;* the charming features of a virtuous character depicted by Christ and his apostles; and the wonderful exhibition of the future prosperity of the church, arrayed in glory and beauty, by the hand of *St. John.*

The Scriptures are the native region of *sublimity, both natural and moral.*

"The single volume of the Scriptures," says sir William Jones, one of the best judges whom the world has ever seen, "contains more and higher specimens of this excellence, than all the remains of Grecian and Roman antiquity united." The God of the Scriptures is an object infinitely sublime; and, wherever he appears, whether his character is exhibited, or his actions are recited, he appears with power, wisdom, and goodness, glory and majesty, to which nothing is equal, nothing second. The works of God, here recounted, are possessed of a splendour suited to his character. The creation; the deluge; the wonders of Egypt, the wilderness, and Canaan; the miracles attendant upon the death, resurrection, and ascension, of the Saviour; the resurrection; the conflagration; the future judgment; and future existence of the righteous and the wicked; are objects, compared with which all other events which have entered into the conceptions of man shrink into nothing.

In moral beauty, greatness, and glory, the Saviour stands alone. *How beautiful,* says the prophet Isaiah, *are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings; that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good; that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth! Unto us,* says the same prophet, *a child is born; unto us a son is*

given: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the Father of the everlasting age, the Prince of peace.

On this divine subject I have no room to expatiate; and shall only observe, that the Scriptures themselves have done more justice to it than can, within the same compass, be done a second time: when they inform us, that Christ is *the Light of heaven, and the effulgence of the divine glory.*

Not less distinguished is this science for the power which it possesses, and the means which it furnishes, *for refining the views and the taste* of man. On the one hand, the Scriptures forbid every thing which is impure and licentious; and, on the other, effectually discourage every thing which is gross and grovelling. To accomplish this combined purpose, they commenced their efforts in the only efficacious manner: viz. *purifying the affections of the heart.* Wherever these are gross and debased, the imagination will be gross, and the taste debased. So universally is this true, that no advantages of education, no superiority of talents, no acquisition of learning, no refinement of society, have hitherto had sufficient power to purify the fancy and the taste, where the affections had been yielded to licentious indulgences. A gross heart will delight in gross objects; and on these objects, so long as they are relished, the imagination will love to dwell. Elegance of mind grows out of the refinement of the heart. It is hence that the sentiments of *Paul and John,* of *Peter and James,* their images and their language, are immeasurably removed from the gross efforts of heathen antiquity. Had Cicero's oration for Cælius, or the third eclogue of the polite and elegant Virgil, formed a part of the sacred volume; either would have furnished an argument against their inspiration, which all succeeding ages could never have refuted; and infidelity would long since have gained a final triumph over the gospel.

In the Scriptures we are presented every where with those objects which, more incomparably than any other, originate and establish refined affections, spotless views, and dignified excursions of the imagination. By a continual correspondence with the precepts of the gospel, the affec-

tions are gradually, and in a sense instinctively, purified. By a frequent recurrence to its sentiments and imagery, the imagination is exalted, and the taste wrought into elegance, as silver is beautified by the hand of the burnisher. By conversing with noble objects, the mind is ennobled in a manner and to a degree which will admit no parallel, is estranged from every thing low and little; assumes insensibly a portion of the celestial character, and directs its flight unceasingly towards heaven.

On the variety and consequent novelty of objects every where presented by the Scriptures to the imagination, it is unnecessary here to expatiate. Both are unceasing; both are endless; and as they are successively unfolded to rational beings, will regularly enhance their enjoyments throughout the ages of eternity.

There is another and very important view in which this subject demands our consideration. *Theology spreads its influence over the creation and providence of God, and gives to both almost all their beauty and sublimity.* Creation and providence, seen by the eye of theology, and elucidated by the glorious commentary on both furnished in the Scriptures, become new objects to the mind; immeasurably more noble, rich, and delightful, than they can appear to a worldly, sensual mind. The heavens and the earth, and the great as well as numberless events which result from the divine administration, are in themselves vast, wonderful, frequently awful, in many instances solemn, in very many exquisitely beautiful, and in a great number eminently sublime. All these attributes however they possess, if considered only in the abstract, in degrees very humble and diminutive, compared with the appearance which they make, when beheld as the works of JEHOVAH. Mountains, the ocean, and the heavens, are majestic and sublime. Hills and valleys, soft landscapes, trees, fruits, and flowers, and many objects in the animal and mineral kingdoms, are beautiful. But what is this beauty, what is this grandeur, compared with that agency of God to which they owe their being? Think what it is for the almighty hand to spread the plains, to heave the mountains, and to pour the ocean. Look at the verdure, flowers, and fruits,

which in the mild season adorn the surface of the earth. The uncreated hand fashions their fine forms, paints their exquisite colours, and exhales their delightful perfumes. In the spring his life reanimates the world; in the summer and autumn his bounty is poured out upon the hills and valleys; in the winter, *his way is in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet.* His hand *hung the earth upon nothing,* lighted up the sun in the heavens, and rolls *the planets* and the comets through the immeasurable fields of ether. His breath kindled the stars; his voice called into existence worlds innumerable; and filled the expanse with animated being. To all he is present; over all he rules; for all he provides. The mind, attempered to divine contemplation, finds him in every solitude; meets him in every walk; and in all places, and at all times, sees itself surrounded by God.

How superior are the works of creation and providence, when considered in this manner, to the highest conceptions, formed by a worldly mind, which merely looks at the things themselves; and with a folly, a stupidity, which is extreme, stops short of their Author. How enhanced is their beauty! how exalted their sublimity!

The pleasures yielded by science to the understanding, are derived extensively from the same sources which furnish so much delight to the imagination. For the understanding also finds exquisite pleasure in that which is new, beautiful, and sublime. At the same time, it is peculiarly delighted with such views as expand the intellectual powers, and with such objects as are seen to possess fitness for valuable purposes; the symmetry of parts happily arranged in a system; the rectitude apparent in their own nature; and their utility to moral beings, and to the universe.

Many sciences are without a question sufficiently extensive to employ and exhaust all the efforts of the intellect. This is true of mathematical and metaphysical science, of natural philosophy and astronomy, medical science, law, and civil policy. It is hardly necessary to observe, that this is eminently true of theological science, which has for its object the character, word, and works, of God; the na-

ture of man; his apostacy; his restoration to the divine kingdom; his virtue, existing as a principle, and operating practically in all his duties to God, his fellow-creatures, and himself; the character, offices, and kingdom, of the Mediator; the character of the Holy Spirit, and his agency in renewing and sanctifying man, and in conducting him to endless life; and that boundless scheme of dispensations which controls all human concerns in the present world, and beyond the grave directs the existence of men and angels, their employments and their allotments, for ever.

At the same time, theology is conversant, more than all other sciences, with that which is beautiful, and that which is sublime: I mean, with that which is seen to be such by the intellect, and not merely that which is felt to be such by the imagination. The truths of theology are without limits conversant with moral excellence; and are extensively employed in unfolding to man whatever is lovely and dignified in the intellectual nature. There is no beauty or dignity of mind but virtue: and there is no virtue but that which is evangelical. It is noble and lovely when in its fairest forms it is seen in such beings as we are. In angels, it is sublime and wonderful. In JEHOVAH, it is exalted, not only above all conception, but *above all blessing and praise*, a summit which, receding beyond the utmost reach of finite minds, will, as they ascend through the endless succession of ages, rise higher, and higher, and higher, for ever.

As the student of theology travels over the scheme of creation and providence disclosed distinctly to his view by the light of revelation; as he wanders especially through the moral world, and sees the objects which are presented to him, continually new, beautiful, and exalted; as his prospects unceasingly expand; as his conceptions perpetually ascend; he is every where delighted, unless he is incapable of being delighted, with the splendour of moral excellence, shining upon him from every direction, investing every object with glory and beauty, and raising his thoughts concerning the Creator and his kingdom, to higher and greater heights, while he lives. In this respect, momentous and delightful beyond measure, all other sciences are comparatively limited, humble, and insignificant.

Nor is theology less distinguished by its tendency to make the student useful both to himself and his fellow-men. To ourselves, the highest point of utility is to become wise and good: to others, to establish in them the same character. The tendency of other sciences to accomplish these ends is at the best feeble and remote: that of theology is direct and efficacious. How many persons, even in humble life and possessing very limited views, have become virtuous by studying the Scriptures. The *nobleness* of the *Bereans* was obtained undoubtedly, as well as exhibited, *in searching* this sacred volume with diligence and candour; and hence they were prepared to *receive* the preaching of the gospel *with all readiness of mind.* The effects produced upon them will be found by others; and, there is the best reason to believe, will ever be found. By a solemn, daily, earnest, intercourse with the truths of the gospel, the mind, not improbably in all cases, becomes habitually sober; purified from gross thoughts; furnished with those which are refined and noble; imbued with an increasing relish for that which is great and good; and withdrawn from that which is little, sordid, and selfish. There is every reason to believe, that great multitudes of mankind have already become Christians, merely by reading the Scriptures sent so extensively through the world by *the British and Foreign Bible Society.*

Virtuous men are essentially the only useful men to others; the only men whose usefulness will extend its efficacy into the regions of future being, and promote the interests of immortality. Compared with this, all other usefulness is narrow and momentary. To *save a soul from death,* and *to cover a multitude of sins,* is to be a benefactor indeed, and to expand beneficence through eternal ages. Such men are also the essential benefactors to their fellow-men in the present world; those, from whose kind counsels, important kind offices, solid consolations, and beneficial examples, are derived. Accordingly, to such men are regularly confided, in almost all cases where it can conveniently be done, the protection and the management of the important private concerns of those around them, when these things demand the assistance of others, beside

those who are immediately interested. There is no case of such a nature, where the superiority of virtuous men is not felt and acknowledged. To such men he who has a just cause will refer it; he who leaves children will commit them to his guardianship; he who makes a will will constitute them his executors; he who is in distress will look to them both for assistance and consolation.

Among the modes in which laymen versed in theological science have been eminently useful to mankind, to elucidate and defend revelation and its doctrines, and to enforce the observance of its precepts, and thus to contribute universally to the establishment of truth and righteousness, and the divine kingdom in the world, is one of the highest moment. The concerns of religion have, in most countries and ages, been left too exclusively in the hands of ministers. Ministers, it is to be remembered, however able, however faithful, are comparatively few in number; and are therefore ill matched with an enormous multitude of opposers. Ministers also are regarded, and ever will be regarded, not only by their open enemies, but by all the stupid, worldly, cold-hearted men, as saying and doing whatever they say or do, either for the defence or advancement of Christianity, *officially;* from necessity, imposed on them by a regard to their reputation; from prejudice in favour of doctrines which they have long taught; from party attachment to those with whom they have been long professionally united; and from selfish wishes to provide subsistence for themselves and their families. All these things can be said with some appearance of truth; and however groundless, cannot always be satisfactorily refuted. None of them are however applicable to laymen when employed in the same cause. *They* will ordinarily be acknowledged to act in this case from real conviction; under the influence of no necessity; without any particular attachment to party; without prejudice; without bias. Their numbers also, and often their employments and character, are, or may be, such as to set at defiance the whole violence, the contempt, and the sneers, of irreligious men.

Accordingly, many laymen have rendered to revelation services of the highest importance. The names of Bacon,

Boyle, Newton, Locke, and Grotius, of Pascal, Addison, Johnson, Littleton, and West, of Jones, Teignmouth, Bryant, Sharp, and Wilberforce, together with many others, will be had in everlasting remembrance, as champions of truth and righteousness, illustrious supporters of Christianity, and glorious instruments of piety and salvation to mankind. What a sanction on this employment did Grotius leave at the close of his life; when referring to his absorption in learning of other kinds, and lamenting that he had not devoted his days wholly to religion, he exclaimed, "Heu! vitam perdidi, nil operose agendo:" "Alas! I have lost life in laboriously doing nothing." Who was ever an abler judge of this subject? In what circumstances could a judgment be more evidently sincere?

Nor ought it to be forgotten, that laymen, by assuming their proper part in the support of Christianity, awaken and increase a just sense of their own duty as the friends of the Redeemer; realize that his cause lies upon them, as well as upon ministers; and feel the importance of thinking, planning, and acting, vigorously in his behalf. That in which we take no other concern than what is experienced in contemplation, will never be very near to our hearts. Its importance may be coldly acknowledged, but it will awaken neither interest nor efforts. When we begin to act, we begin to feel. Were laymen to act more generally and more vigorously in the cause of Christianity, its interests would come home to their hearts; and they would speedily become more virtuous and more useful members of Christian society.

I have dwelt thus particularly on this subject, not only because of its inherent importance, but also because it has not, within my information, been brought into the desk; and because there is no place where it can with more propriety be introduced than in this, and no audience to which it can with more propriety be addressed.

IV. *How solemnly does the scriptural system of doctrines and precepts demand the cordial reception of every man to whom it is published!*

Every one of those who hear me is a creature of [illegible]

countable creature; an immortal creature. Every one bound to the grave and the judgment. Every one is a candidate for heaven or hell. To every one life is a day of trial. On your conduct in this life is suspended your destiny in that which is to come.

All of you also are sinners. You have offended God. You have broken his most holy law, times innumerable, with a bold hand, a hard heart, and a blind mind. By that law you are condemned, and cannot be justified.

Your sins also are gross and dreadful; not perhaps scandalous, and such as cover you with infamy, but such as have been committed in the meridian day of the gospel, against the dictates of an enlightened conscience, against blessings of high moment, daily and hourly renewed. Ignorance of your Lord's will you cannot plead, for you have known it from early life. Leisure for understanding it, books, instructions, motives, have been supplied to you with a munificent hand. Your allotments in life have been mercifully distributed by the great Benefactor. He has called to you with a voice of unspeakable kindness. He has charmed you with continual testimonies of parental love.

In these circumstances, and amid so many inducements to hear and to obey, the Saviour of mankind has placed himself directly before your eyes, suspended on the cross, and expiring in agonies, to atone for your sins, and to reconcile you to God. He has offered to you himself, and all his blessings; and of you he has required nothing, but cordially to receive him. Instead of listening, there is but too melancholy reason to believe, you have turned a deaf ear and a blind eye, to all that he has said and done. He has called; but you have refused. To what has he called you? To purification from sin; to forgiveness; to sanctification; to the attainment of the everlasting love of God; to the possession of heaven; to the blessings of immortal life.

But he knew that your hearts were harder than the nether millstone. He therefore sent his holy and good Spirit into the world to enlighten your minds; to convince you of your guilt and danger; to unfold to you the divine

excellence of the Redeemer; and by the renovation of your hearts to persuade you to embrace him, as he is offered to you in the gospel. A thousand times has this glorious agent awakened in your minds a solemn sense of their worth and their immortality; led you to serious reflections on your guilt; excited in you alarming apprehensions concerning death and the judgment; and prompted you to sober resolutions of repentance and reformation.

All these benevolent efforts you have resisted. All the grace of the gospel, all the benevolent offers which Christ has made you, all his merciful invitations and promises, you have rejected. On his cross you have cast contempt. To his character you have been hostile. You have *grieved the Spirit of grace.* You have *wronged your own souls.*

Still you are bound to eternity. You must die: you will be judged: you will be *rewarded according to your works. Consider this, ye that forget God, lest he tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver.*

In this solemn, this exposed situation, immeasurably interesting to every one of you, what measures will you take? Remember, that whatever you may think proper to do, God will take his own measures. You may wish that he would do otherwise. You may hope, you may believe, you may determine, that he will bend his purposes so as to make them more palatable to you. Under this determination, and with these hopes, you may feel yourselves safe; and say, *Peace, peace, when there is no peace.* Like Agag, you may exclaim, *Surely the bitterness of death is past;* when you are on the point of being *hewed in pieces.* The providence of your Maker, whatever you may wish or believe, will move on uninterruptedly and immutably to the accomplishment of every one of his purposes; and of those which respect your salvation and your perdition as truly as any other. When you come to the regions of woe, with what anguish will you look back upon your present life, and wish that you had now listened to the calls of mercy; that you had been roused from this *sleep* of death, and obtained life from the hands of the Saviour!

It is not necessary, that every one should be learned in theology: but it is necessary that every man should be

Christian. The souls of the learned and the unlearned are alike immortal; and are alike destined to endless happiness, or endless misery. How will you acquire this glorious blessing, and escape this absolute ruin? There is but one path which has hitherto conducted, there is but one path which will ever conduct, mankind to eternal life. This has been pointed out by the finger of God; and was never discovered by human philosophy. The cell of philosophy is dug beneath the ground; is dark, cold, and comfortless; and was never visited by the sunshine of heaven. The miserable rushlight which glimmers along its walls, scarcely enables this goddess of man's creation to distinguish her own footsteps around the dreary cavern; and shews no avenue to the world above. Here no celestial messenger ever arrived; and no tidings from that world were ever announced. Here God is neither worshipped, loved, nor known; the voice of mercy was never heard; and salvation was never proclaimed, sought, nor found.

The gospel, at an immeasurable distance from this desolate mansion, is the garden of Eden in its pristine beauty. Here JEHOVAH manifests himself in the Shechinah; as of old *he caused the glory of his presence to dwell at the east of Paradise above the cherubim.** Here his answers are given to the inquiring penitent. Here angels are again heard *praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest; peace on earth; and good-will towards men.* Here the *Saviour is born; and publishes the glad tidings of great joy.* Here the Spirit of grace fixes his divine abode, and sheds piety, and peace, and faith, and hope, upon the assembly of the first-born. Here finally commences *the highway of holiness,* which leads directly to the regions of immortality.

Who in this house can contemplate these things without the strongest emotions? Who can behold his all at hazard; his soul, his eternal well-being, at stake; without inexpressible anxiety? Life and death, both eternal, are here the objects of choice. Whose bosom must not thrill; whose heart must not throb; when famishing with thirst, and

* Genesis iii. 24, paraphrased by the Targums.

perishing with hunger, he hears a voice fro[illegible] ing directly to himself, *Ho! every one that [illegible] ye to the waters; and he that hath no m[illegible] buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk, [illegible] and without price.* With what transport will he le[illegible] the voice which conveys this delightful invitation [illegible] voice of the Son of God! Must not his soul expa[illegible] ecstasy, to see the almighty arm of this glorious Pers[illegible] stretched out to seize him, while walking on the brink o[illegible] perdition, and convey him to the world of joy!

On the brink of perdition every sinner i[illegible] this house is walking at the present moment. The only way back to eternal life; the only safety, the only hope; is found in the gospel. Strive then with all possible earnestness to [illegible] *in at the strait gate,* which stands at the head of this delightful path. Now the gate is open: soon to you it will be shut. Now the path is illumined by the Sun of righteousness: soon it will be lost in interminable darkness. Now heaven invites you to *enter in and be saved.* Soon its doors will be closed for ever. Now God is reconcilable to you; the Saviour proffers himself and all his blessings to your acceptance; and the Spirit of grace is waiting to renew you to repentance. How soon will all these blessings retire beyond your reach: the hope of salvation set to rise no more; and the voice of mercy be dumb for ever!

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THE END.

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